

GROWTH RATE IN THE U.S. ECONOMY
IN THE QUARTER BEFORE BILL CLINTON TOOK OFFICE: +4.5%
IN THE QUARTER BEFORE GEORGE W. BUSH TOOK OFFICE: +2.1%
IN THE QUARTER BEFORE OBAMA TOOK OFFICE: -6.3%

NUMBER OF ARTICLES IN MAJOR NEWSPAPERS MENTIONING "PORTUGUESE WATER DOG" OVER THE PAST YEAR: 454
PERCENTAGE OF THOSE ARTICLES THAT WERE PUBLISHED OVER THE PAST THREE MONTHS: 75

DATE ON WHICH MICHELLE OBAMA WORE A J. CREW ENSEMBLE TO VISIT 10 DOWNING STREET: APRIL 1 » **TIME THAT DAY BY WHICH J. CREW'S WEB SITE HAD SOLD OUT OF HER CARDIGAN: 10 A.M. EASTERN** » **INCREASE IN J. CREW STOCK SINCE JAN. 20: 65%**

MICHELLE OBAMA'S FAVORABLE RATING
IN JUNE '08: 48%
NOW: 76%

NUMBER OF AIG FINANCIAL PRODUCTS EMPLOYEES WHO RECEIVED BONUSES OF \$1 MILLION OR MORE: 73 » **TOTAL AMOUNT OF BONUSES RECEIVED BY AIG FINANCIAL PRODUCTS EMPLOYEES: \$165 MILLION** » **AMOUNT THEY PLEDGED TO RETURN: \$50 MILLION**

AGE OF YOUNGEST PERSON APPOINTED BY OBAMA TO A SENIOR WHITE HOUSE POST: 25
AGE OF THE OLDEST: 65 » **AVERAGE AGE: 46**

NUMBER OF APPOINTMENTS CONFIRMED BY THE SENATE: 65
NUMBER OF CONFIRMABLE POSITIONS REMAINING: 421

NUMBER OF BANKS THAT HAVE FAILED SINCE OBAMA TOOK OFFICE: 27
NUMBER THAT FAILED IN ALL OF 2008: 25

PERCENTAGE OF RONALD REAGAN'S CABINET MEMBERS WHO WERE WHITE: 94 » **OF GEORGE H.W. BUSH'S: 82** » **OF BILL CLINTON'S: 68** » **OF GEORGE W. BUSH'S: 73** » **OF OBAMA'S: 55**

PERCENTAGE OF AMERICANS WHO SAID THE NATION WAS MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION IN DECEMBER: 15
PERCENTAGE WHO FEEL THAT WAY NOW: 50

NUMBER OF FORMER PROFESSIONAL BASKETBALL PLAYERS IN OBAMA'S CABINET: 1

CHANGE IN DOW JONES INDUSTRIAL AVERAGE FROM JAN. 20, 2009: +1%
CHANGE FROM JAN. 20, 2008: -34%

PERCENTAGE OF ANNOUNCED, NOMINATED OR CONFIRMED OBAMA OFFICIALS WHO WORKED IN THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION: 41

PERCENTAGE OF U.S. PRESIDENTS SINCE THE END OF WORLD WAR II WHO HAVE BEEN LEFT-HANDED: 42
PERCENTAGE OF GENERAL POPULATION THAT IS LEFT-HANDED: 10

NUMBER OF DAYS GEORGE W. BUSH WAS IN OFFICE BEFORE HE REINSTATED THE POLICY PROHIBITING INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS RECEIVING FEDERAL FUNDING FROM PERFORMING ABORTIONS: 2
NUMBER OF DAYS OBAMA WAS IN OFFICE BEFORE HE RESCINDED IT: 3

NUMBER OF CEOS WHO RESIGNED UNDER PRESSURE FROM THE WHITE HOUSE: 1

DAYS LEFT IN OBAMA'S TERM:
1,362

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29, 2009

The president's ambitious agenda and the moments that shaped it. Page AA3

The Obamas' connection with Washington at all levels. Page AA7

For videos, more photos and live discussion, go to washingtonpost.com/100days.

100 Days



ECONOMY: President Obama met with economic advisers from the administration and Congress on Feb. 25 to discuss the crisis.



FIRST LADY: Michelle Obama made an impression on Europeans when she accompanied her husband on his trip early this month.



IRAQ: Obama greeted troops at Camp Victory in Baghdad during a surprise visit there April 7. He has set a timeline for troop withdrawal.

Scenes From the Young Presidency

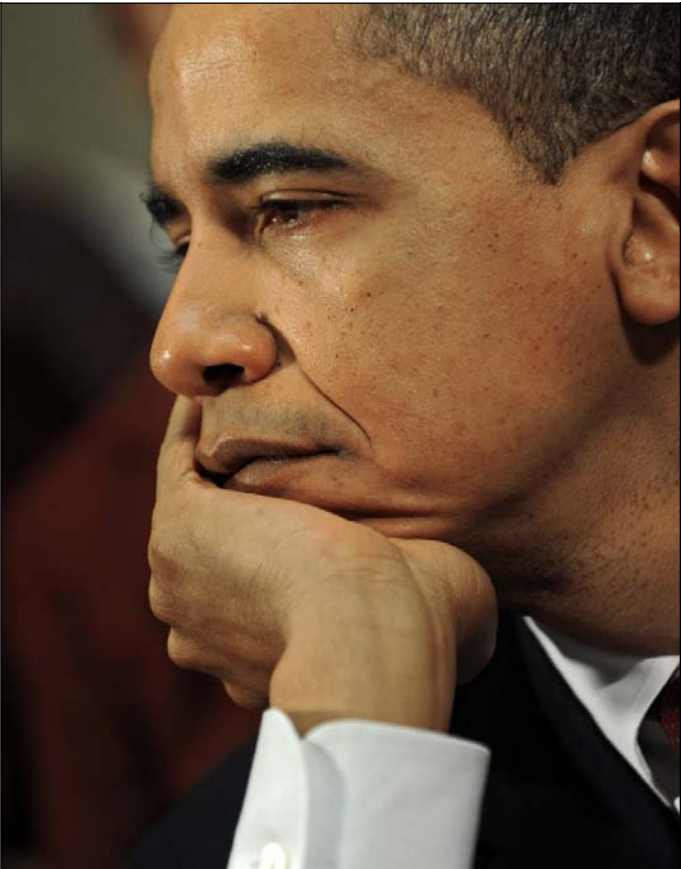
Washington Battles, a World Debut and a Furry New Family Member



FAMILY: The Obamas — from left, Malia, the president, Sasha and Michelle — introduced their new Portuguese water dog, Bo, on April 14. Public interest in the first family, from their clothes to their pet, is intense.



ACHIEVEMENTS: Obama signed the Omnibus Public Land Management Act, a sweeping piece of conservation legislation, on March 30. He has also enacted his economic stimulus package, shifted the strategy for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and changed policies on detainees.



CHALLENGES: The president's setbacks have included missteps on nominations and faltering attempts at bipartisanship.



COMMUNITY: Local middle school students joined the president at the White House March 24 to talk to astronauts on the space station.



CABINET: Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates attended the first Cabinet meeting April 20.



GLOBAL STAGE: Obama, Italy's Silvio Berlusconi, center, and Russia's Dmitry Medvedev at the G-20 summit on April 2.

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You've heard pundits assess Obama's record; now see how everyday people rate his presidency so far.

Explore the key moments in Obama's presidency in an interactive graphic and timeline.



President Obama addresses a joint session of Congress on Feb. 24. Even before taking office, he decided that he would challenge Washington to confront the nation's pressing problems all at once, arguing that they are intertwined.

Bruised by Stimulus Battle, Obama Changed His Approach to Washington

By SCOTT WILSON
Washington Post Staff Writer

The night before the Senate vote on President Obama's \$787 billion stimulus bill, one question echoed through the West Wing:

Where is Arlen Specter?
The Republican senator from Pennsylvania would not answer his phone. Not for White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, Pennsylvania Gov. Edward G. Rendell (D) or Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.), the Senate majority leader.

The president, a senator himself only a few months before, had spent weeks courting Specter. Obama had invited him to his Super Bowl party days earlier, gently teasing the prickly lawmaker about wearing a coat and tie to a relaxed social gathering. He had also brought Specter in for a 15-minute, one-on-one session in the Oval Office.

"This is the first president I've ever met alone," Specter would later say of the meeting. "I'm just searching for the right word — it was unique."

With the vote only hours away, the job of finding the senator fell to Vice President Biden, who reached him by phone on the morning of the Feb. 13 vote. Soon after, Biden called Emanuel, who had been operating on virtually no sleep for several days, with the news: Specter would vote yes. In return for his support, Specter, who has Hodgkin's disease, won a large increase in cancer research funding for the National Institutes of Health.

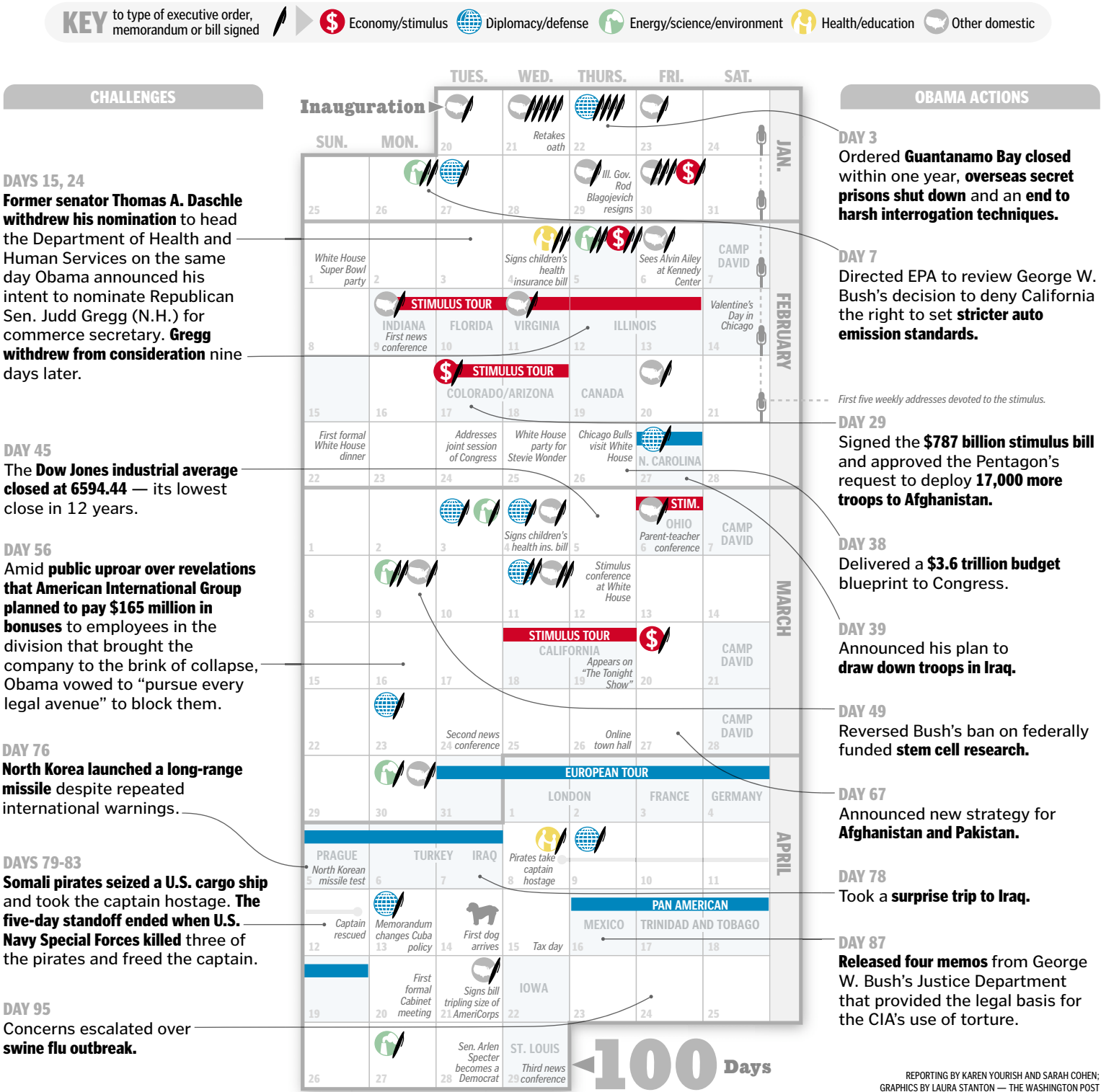
"The dominoes," a senior adviser involved in the lobbying effort recalled, "began to fall into place."

Hours later, the Senate delivered the filibuster-proof 60 votes needed in favor of a measure that senior White House officials noted among themselves was more costly than the New Deal. For Specter, the vote represented a major step toward leaving the Republican Party, a defection he announced yesterday, putting Obama closer to being able to force his will in the Senate.

"While we passed the largest piece of domestic spending legislation in history, we went through 48 hours of not knowing if we were going to get anything at all," said a senior administration official involved in the stimulus campaign. "In the end, you saw what a thin, thin, thin margin it was."

During his first 100 days, Obama has moved quickly to strengthen the U.S. economy, refine the American strategy in two foreign wars and reverse Bush-era detention and interrogation policies that have drawn condemnation at home and abroad. But his first weeks in office have also showed a president who, rather than

A look at key actions in President Obama's first 100 days:



changing Washington, as he pledged during his historic campaign, was being changed by it.

The near-defeat of his stimulus plan has emerged as the seminal learning experience for Obama and his fledgling administration, which came to Washington with equally high measures of ambition and confidence in its ability to quickly begin remaking the country. Along the way, Obama and his advisers, who had campaigned against Washington's insular politics, made several missteps that undermined their message of reform and helped stoke the

capital's partisan traditions.

At the core of the misjudgment were poll-driven assumptions made by the president's senior advisers, many of them schooled in politics on Capitol Hill. Several believed that a fair number of Republican lawmakers would rally behind the nation's first African American president at a time of crisis, an assessment that proved wrong when only three GOP senators supported the stimulus measure and not a single House Republican followed suit.

But Obama and his advisers corrected course quickly. Drawing con-

clusions from a post-mortem analysis that Emanuel conducted of the stimulus battle, senior White House advisers returned to the successful tactics of the presidential campaign, taking the president and his message beyond the Beltway and scaling back his appeals to congressional Republicans. The approach has defined the way he has governed since.

A month after he nearly lost his stimulus bill, Obama faced another critical test in Congress, this time a vote on his \$3.5 trillion budget proposal. In preparation, he traveled outside Washington, appearing at

town hall meetings, in prime-time news conferences and on late-night talk shows. One senior adviser said the president did not make a single call to a lawmaker seeking support for the budget blueprint, which is expected to gain final approval from Congress today.

"It's kind of like he decided 'I'm the boss,'" said Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.).

Even before taking office, Obama decided he would challenge Washington to confront all of the country's most pressing problems at the same time. He has used his first 100

days to begin marking out, through rhetoric and legislation, the way he believes Americans should receive health care, produce energy, spend and invest their money, and engage the world after a period of history during which he thinks the country veered far from its moral bearings.

His critics on the left say he has not gone far enough, whether in attempting to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan or on social policy.

From the right, Obama has been criticized for not scaling back his expensive domestic priorities despite a soaring national debt. His call-and-response diplomacy with Iran and Cuba, his appeal from a city square in Prague for a nuclear-free world and his prohibition of torture strike conservatives as a dangerously naive approach to a perilous world.

But few would argue that his decisions — to withdraw combat forces in Iraq by the end of August 2010, help cash-poor mortgage holders stay in their homes and confront the legacy of harsh detainee policies — have not changed the course of government. For the first time in five years, according to polls conducted this month, more Americans say the country is heading in the right direction than in the wrong one.

Late one evening, after a long day, one senior adviser said he joked with Obama about another president who inherited a country in dire economic straits, Franklin D. Roosevelt.

"I told him I had to give Roosevelt credit," the adviser recalled. "He waited eight years before he had his war."

This account of Obama's first 100 days draws on interviews with more than a dozen senior administration officials, Cabinet members and congressional leaders who have participated directly in the most important policy debates of this stage-setting period.

Economy in Crisis

Over several days of meetings in mid-December, the president-elect and his advisers began to fathom the depth of the troubles ahead.

In Chicago, the administration-in-waiting gathered in a conference room at the federal building, where the transition from campaign to government was underway.

First came a national security meeting, after which Obama remarked, according to a senior adviser present, "You know it's bad when Iraq isn't even the biggest worry out there."

Then, on Dec. 16, the staff assembled to hear Christina Romer, Lawrence H. Summers, Timothy F. Geithner and others describe an economy in a state of near-free fall.

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100 Days

After Missteps, Obama Redefined His Strategy

OBAMA, From Page AA3

Romer, an MIT-educated economist, took on the role of selling Obama on the need for a much larger fiscal stimulus package than had been proposed.

She had charts, graphs and a sheaf of ominous economic indicators — “numbers we’d all been looking at our whole lives,” another senior adviser said, “and had never seen anything like before.”

Just three months earlier, as the global reach of the subprime mortgage crisis came into view, economists talked about the need for a fiscal stimulus of as much as \$150 billion. In internal conversations, the Obama transition team had concluded that the amount would have to be much larger.

On this day, Romer, Summers and others outlined a package of public works spending, unemployment benefits expansion and tax cuts more than four times that size. The economy was contracting at an annual rate of 6.5 percent, the fastest since 1982.

During her presentation, Romer told Obama that Americans had yet to have their “holy [expletive]” moment over the economy, a phrase she had borrowed moments earlier from the more profane David Axelrod, Obama’s senior political adviser.

Obama was taken aback, and not just by the numbers. “I’m still trying to get my arms around the fact you said [expletive],” he told the bookish economist.

“I walked up to him afterward and said, ‘That has got to be about the worst meeting a president-elect has ever had,’” recalled Austan Goolsbee, a member of the White House Council of Economic Advisers, which Romer now heads. “He said, ‘That’s not even the worst meeting I’ve had this week.’”

Bumps in the Road

Obama, who was studying Roosevelt’s first 100 days, taking particular interest in how the former president sought to both comfort and brace the country as he took office, understood that in terms of domestic policy he had become commander in chief already. He began talking directly to the country about the economy and how he intended to fix it.

He decided, his advisers say, that he would convey the idea that the nation’s problems, from the retreating economy to falling student test scores, were intertwined as he pressed for action on a host of fronts simultaneously.

Mona Sutphen, the deputy chief

of staff for policy, said the pre-inauguration period in Washington was used to “get intellectually ready” for such first steps as the signing of legislation on equal-pay and children’s health insurance, an Iraq policy review, and executive orders closing the military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and banning Bush-era interrogation tactics.

“As Rahm said, ‘In Washington, you’re either pitching balls or receiving balls. And we need to be pitching,’” Sutphen said. “We just didn’t buy the notion that these things could wait.”

In the days after the Jan. 20 inauguration, when Obama challenged the nation to “choose our better history,” the administration confronted the challenge of new surroundings.

There were the new cellphone numbers no one else knew. E-mail accounts that had yet to function. Virtually no support staff.

An initial goal of having Congress move the stimulus bill to his desk by Inauguration Day had faded, and Obama set Feb. 16 — Presidents’ Day — as the new deadline. As he would note in a prime-time news conference five weeks later, “Obviously, at the inauguration, I think that there was justifiable pride on the part of the country that we had taken a step to move us beyond some of the searing legacies of racial discrimination in this country.

“But,” he added, “that lasted about a day.”

The work began on the fly. One of several of Obama’s senior advisers who served in the Clinton administration noted that amid a far milder recession, President Bill Clinton pitched a \$25 billion spending bill, then cut it to \$16 billion in the face of opposition to its size. “We still lost,” the adviser said.

Having arrived in Washington on a promise to promote bipartisanship, Obama began holding Wednesday night cocktail parties at the White House with lawmakers, events directed informally toward winning support for his stimulus bill.

He traveled to Capitol Hill to meet with the House and Senate Republican caucuses, as well as with conservative Democrats who worried about the size of the measure.

“There was a huge outreach to congressional Republicans,” said Ray LaHood, a former GOP House member from Illinois who is now Obama’s transportation secretary.

Emanuel, who had chaired the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee only months earlier, designed the legislative strategy. Phil Schilliro, a longtime Hill staff member picked to run Obama’s



BY BILL O’LEARY — THE WASHINGTON POST

In pushing the stimulus, one challenge for President Obama’s team was finding a way to translate support outside the Beltway into votes in Congress.

CONTRIBUTORS

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of Legislative Affairs, executed it.

“This is going to be the biggest vote in a whole bunch of members’ lives,” Goolsbee recalled Schilliro telling the senior staff. “Some are going to be new members, and they won’t have hired staff. So this is going to have a very high degree of difficulty.”

Republican House leaders recall a meeting in the West Wing’s Roosevelt Room days after the inauguration that, for them, set the tone for the rest of the debate.

The bill then emerging in the House, where Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) watched over it, had grown to \$825 billion. House Minority Leader John A. Boehner (R-Ohio) and Minority Whip Eric Cantor (R-Va.) urged the president to pare it back.

Obama said he would think over their proposals, according to Republican lawmakers in the room. When Cantor pressed him to lower business-investment tax rates and reconsider the tax breaks for low-income families, Obama responded: “I won. So I think on that one, I trump you.” “There was plenty of opportunity

to incorporate some of our ideas, all of our ideas,” Boehner said later. Shortly after the House approved the bill along party lines, he said, “it became clear to us that they didn’t want to work with us.”

At the same time, one of Obama’s most important Cabinet nominees, former Senate majority leader Thomas A. Daschle (D-S.D.), nominated to run the Department of Health and Human Services and coordinate health-care reform, had run into trouble over the \$128,000 in back taxes he paid days before his confirmation hearings. The president, who a day after taking office had signed an executive order to ensure a more transparent government, stuck by Daschle for five days until he withdrew his nomination under pressure on Feb. 3.

“We internally overrode our best instincts on how something would play and how people would perceive it,” Axelrod said.

By then, the stimulus package had grown to nearly \$900 billion. Conservative cable-news hosts carried the message daily that the bill had become the creation of the Hill’s liberal Democratic leadership.

Axelrod, who is most responsible for designing the way the administration talks publicly about its agenda, said the debate had become muddled by claims of broken pledges of bipartisanship and the measure’s growing cost.

“There was a sense this thing was beginning to cut against him,” he said. “None of which was true. I mean, I’m looking at polling, like, all the time. There was very consistent support for him out there. But that wasn’t the story here.”

Beyond the Beltway

Senate Republicans and Democrats began trimming the package, which had grown to \$930 billion, even as a new report showed that the economy had shed nearly 600,000 jobs in the month of Obama’s inauguration.

“Everybody [in Congress] was very concerned about the optics,” Axelrod recalled. “So the thing had to be under \$800 billion. It did fall in the guidelines the president originally set, but it was members who insisted on a rigid number.”

A few hours after the grim report was released, Obama flew to Camp David, seeking a breather from the frenzied lobbying and a first look at the presidential retreat.

On his return, Obama, after weeks of bipartisan outreach, jumped on Air Force One for town hall-style meetings in ailing Indiana and Florida. The campaign, in essence, began again.

“It was like we were living in an alternate universe in Washington,” Sutphen said. “That’s when we realized we had to lift this up, reconnect it to the urgency felt by everyone who didn’t read Roll Call.”

The calls of support began to come into congressional offices, not only from constituents but also from manufacturing groups, union members and Republican governors.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act won the 60 votes it needed in the Senate. Not one more.

“So you have one of the greatest legislative victories in history turned somehow into a semi-defeat,” a senior administration official said. “The lesson is that we can’t measure our

success by how many Republican votes we get. Our approach to the budget showed that. You just don’t mess around.”

Changing Tone

The administration was determined not to make the same mistakes on Obama’s budget proposal, a far-reaching statement of where he intends to take the country. Informed by the stimulus experience, Obama embarked from the start on an approach that largely ignored Washington.

But the administration, which had evolved from a campaign team that relied on an army of volunteers, had yet to establish a way to bring the sentiment “out there” into the halls of Congress.

“We clearly didn’t have the politics right about how to deal with the outside game,” said a senior administration official who previously worked on the Hill. “I think there was an assumption based on a huge electoral landslide . . . that Republicans would at least find some good politics in working with the president.”

As it took office, the administration had planned to give Obama’s formidable grass-roots political network what one senior adviser called “a few months off” after the grueling campaign season. David Plouffe, Obama’s campaign manager and an informal White House adviser, had informed the president’s senior advisers that “we had really run our people into the ground,” according to one of them.

“It became very clear we couldn’t

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Communicator in Chief Has a Tone for Every Situation

By ALEC MACGILLIS
Washington Post Staff Writer

From the start, the orator who had reached the White House based in no small part on his eloquence made it clear that he would not necessarily be delivering the same soaring stuff as he did in his campaign.

“What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility,” Barack Obama said in a conspicuously earthbound inaugural address. “A recognition, on the part of every American, that we have duties . . . that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character than giving our all to a difficult task.”

But President Obama’s turn of the dial did not mean he would relinquish the powers of rhetoric. Far from it. His first 100 days have been marked by the omnipresence of Obama the communicator — in speeches, news conferences, stump appearances, weekly YouTube addresses and even late-night TV.

Most notable about all the words spoken is the variability of their tone, the way in which Obama has

modulated his pitch for different moments. Underlying these shifts have been the defining tensions of the first 100 days — how to make the case for action on the economy without being too pessimistic, how to be tough without being too partisan, how to share outrage about Wall Street without being inflammatory.

In his first weeks in office, Obama was trying to sound above the fray, urging bipartisan action on the big economic stimulus package. “I will continue working with both parties so that the strongest possible bill gets to my desk,” he said in a Jan. 31 YouTube address. “With the stakes so high, we simply cannot afford the same old gridlock and partisan posturing in Washington.”

But after zero House Republicans voted for the measure, he struck a fiercer tone at a House Democratic retreat. “Then you get the argument, ‘Well, this is not a stimulus bill, it’s a spending bill,’” he said, smiling ironically and raising his hands in chiding, Italian-uncle fashion. “What do you think a stimulus is? That’s the whole point!”

He carried a similarly spirited tone onto the road, as he fled Washington for town hall meetings that

echoed the campaign. In Elkhart, Ind., he sympathized with those hurt by the recession — “young people who put that college acceptance back in the envelope because they just can’t afford it” — and derided the opposition, pointing his finger for emphasis: “We can’t posture and bicker and resort to the same failed ideas that got us into this mess in the first place. That was what this election was all about!”

To goad action, Obama spoke in dark tones about the economy — too dark, some said. “If you delay acting on an economy of this severity, then you potentially create a negative spiral that becomes much more difficult for us to get out of,” he said in his first presidential news conference, where his answers were in-depth and almost professorial in nature. “This is not your ordinary run-of-the-mill recession. We are going through the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.”

Two weeks later, he shifted to a more optimistic tone in his joint address to Congress. “We are not quitters,” he said. “Even in the most trying times, amid the most difficult circumstances, there is a generosity, a resilience, a decency, and a determi-

nation that perseveres.”

Obama carried the buoyant tone further in his March appearances on “60 Minutes” and “The Tonight Show.” He bantered with Jay Leno about life in the bubble, leaning in comfortably on the couch, but his levity also produced an unfortunate quip about the Special Olympics.

And by then, the ground had shifted to the point where severity was again called for: Cable news was in an uproar over the American International Group bonuses, and Obama decided he needed to share the anger. “How do they justify this outrage to taxpayers?” he said at the White House on March 16. A week later, amid worries that the flames were getting out of control, he offered a more judicious tone in his second news conference: “The rest of us can’t afford to demonize every investor or entrepreneur who seeks to make a profit.”

His trip to Europe demanded its own nuance — putting on a friendlier face to the world without overdoing it. “There’s been times where America’s shown arrogance and been dismissive, even derisive,” he said in Strasbourg, France. “But in Europe, there is an anti-American-



BY MELINA MARA — THE WASHINGTON POST

ON WASHINGTONPOST.COM/100DAYS

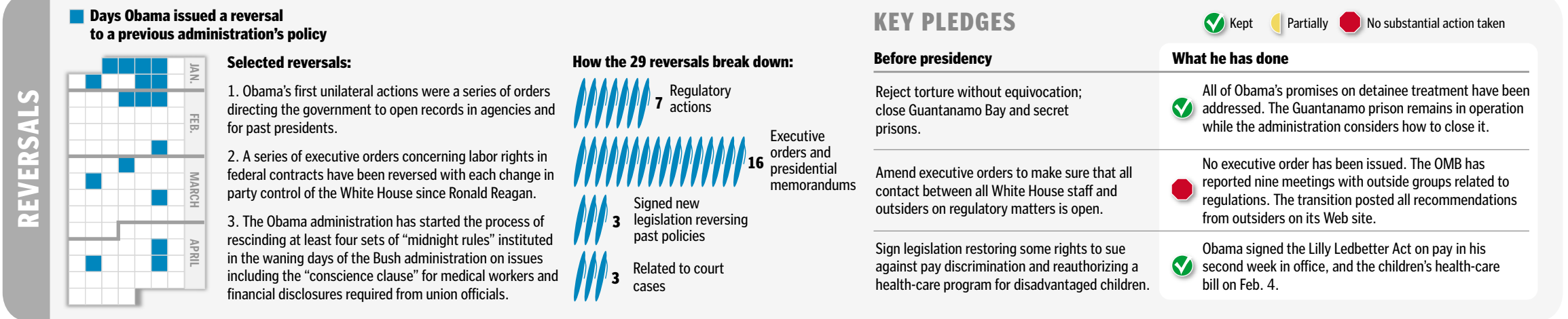


Obama has used his extraordinary rhetorical skills to help set the tone during the tumultuous first 100 days of his administration.

ism that is at once casual but can also be insidious. Instead of recognizing the good that America so often does in the world, there have been times that Europe chooses to blame America for much of what’s bad.”

Back in the States, he delivered a speech at Georgetown University on April 14 that summed up his emerg-

ing agenda. Much had happened since the inauguration, but the address carried the same sober tone as he had that day — a tone that appears likely to be the dominant one amid an array of voices that he will rely on moving forward. “We cannot rebuild this economy on the same pile of sand,” he said. “We must build our house upon a rock.”





Vice President Biden, President Obama and Namaste Solar's chief executive, Blake Jones, tour the roof of Denver's science museum in February. The president stepped away from D.C., traveling to the Mile-High City, to sign the stimulus bill.

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do that," the senior official said of the planned rest for their troops in the field, adding that the administration began spending "way more time trying to figure the outside of it out to give us some cover" as the budget debate began.

As his administration began selling the budget, a distraction arose. The Washington Post reported on March 16 that American International Group, the insurance giant that had received \$170 billion in government funding to avoid collapse, would pay out \$165 million in executive bonuses.

According to a senior adviser who was in the meeting when Obama was told about the bonuses — days before they became public — the president responded, "You've got to be kidding."

Obama and his aides explored what could be done to block the bonus payments. But there was a difference of opinion between Obama's more politically minded advisers, who anticipated how explosive the matter could become, and his economic advisers, who believed that the administration should honor the contracts and move on.

One senior administration official said Geithner did not initially believe that the issue was serious enough for him to bring it up directly with the president.

"There's always been this sort of weird conversation back and forth between the finance guys, who come from that world," said one senior adviser involved in the first meetings. "Their thing is, 'We get all that [anger], but the fact is this is the way the system works on Wall Street.'"

In a March 18 town hall forum in Orange County, Calif., the president told an audience of unemployed teachers, labor officials, students and others that "these bonuses, as outrageous as they are, are a symptom of a much larger problem."

"And that's the system and culture that made them possible — a culture where people made enormous sums of money, taking irresponsible risks that have now put the entire economy at risk," he said.

The West Coast trip was one of several designed for Obama to pitch his budget plan, which includes long-term funding for such top domestic priorities as expanding health-care coverage, creating a clean-energy industry and improving public education. The trip included two town hall meetings and an appearance on "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno," a venue never used before by a sitting president.

This time, Obama paid little attention to how many Republican lawmakers signed on to his budget plan, and it passed by a far larger margin than the White House anticipated.

"He changed his tone on the budget," said Isakson, the Republican senator from Georgia. "He went from being more suggestive in his tone of what he might want to do, to declaratory in terms of saying, 'This is what we are going to do, and this is why.'"

Team Obama

Another story has played out over these 100 days. An African American couple has moved two young daughters from Chicago and begun transforming a historic residence into their home.

The Obamas moved from the Hyde Park neighborhood to Washington the first week of January, earlier than most first families arrive. There was a new school for the girls to prepare for. On Jan. 5, Sasha, her hair in pigtails, and Malia, her hair in twists, said goodbye to Dad and headed from the Hay-Adams Hotel to Sidwell Friends School.

In settling in, they picked a playground set and a puppy named Bo, who two weeks ago attended a meeting of the president's senior economic advisers. Family dinners have often provided Obama an evening respite before he crosses from the East Wing to the West Wing, a border between family and work that first lady Michelle Obama is trying hard to enforce.

The Obamas have searched for a church, traveled to elementary school basketball games by motorcade and attended parent-teacher conferences for their daughters. Michelle Obama also plays a part in the West Wing — as senior adviser for encouragement and solace. On days she identifies as particularly difficult for her husband, she will make an unannounced visit to the Oval Office.

The president also began to carve out his own routine.

An avid basketball player, Obama brought in a personal trainer from Chicago, with whom aides say he works out four times a week. He has also sought to end the eat-at-your-desk Washington culture embraced by his senior aides — targeting their waistlines and cholesterol counts.

Obama offers the trainer to his senior advisers, too, needling Axelrod and Pete Rouse in particular to get on the treadmill. The first lady pushes the same health and nutrition ethos in the East Wing that the president does in the West.

"The president has mentioned to all of us that he knows we're under stress. He knows that we don't eat well," said Robert Gibbs, his press secretary. "If we want to use a trainer, he's got a good one."

On the morning of April 17, during the president's trip to Mexico City, Gibbs surprised the president by appearing in the gym of the InterContinental Hotel. Obama had rarely, if ever, seen his press secretary in workout gear.

"He just looked at me and said, 'This is a good thing, Gibbs,'" he recalled.

At the same time, the team in the White House has been transforming itself.

During the stimulus campaign, Obama's senior staff began to assume distinct roles in West Wing, with Emanuel, in the words of one adviser, serving as the "field general."

The spiritual center of the senior staff is the crew of campaign veterans from Chicago, namely Valerie Jarrett and Axelrod. One senior ad-

viser, who is among a group of former Clinton administration officials, said the Chicago team "claims some ownership of the president and tries its best to keep the campaign spirit alive" in the White House.

Next to Emanuel, Axelrod has assumed the broadest portfolio, participating in the most important national security meetings, largely as an observer, and in such pivotal economic meetings as the March 26 gathering in which Obama decided to fire G. Richard Wagoner Jr., the chief executive of General Motors. "He sees his role here as implementing Obama-ism, not trying to mitigate it or moderate it for political expedience," said another senior adviser. "He believes that if the president can fulfill what he ran on, he'll be just fine politically."

Jarrett, a longtime family friend and Obama's liaison to the business world, is, in the words of another senior adviser, the president's "institutional memory." While Axelrod knows how Obama will want to talk about an issue, this adviser said, "Valerie knows how he feels about it."

Obama, a former law professor, encourages debate among his advisers, asking them to stake out opposing positions and often pushing rivals to argue their points further as he listens. He listens to everyone in the room before presenting his own view and decision.

"Then," the adviser said, "the meeting is over."

From the vantage of his inner circle, the new president has stepped into the role by projecting a sense of calm and confidence. The "no-drama Obama" campaign mantra has been adopted by Obama the president, sometimes through glimmers of humor during serious times.

While visiting Prague this month, Obama was awakened with news that North Korea had fired a long-range missile, and he joined Axelrod and Mark Lippert, the National Security Council chief of staff, in a secure room in their hotel to discuss the development. Looking at Axelrod, his hair suffering from an acute case of bedhead, and Lippert, who had thrown on a pair of shorts, Obama quipped: "I don't know which is more frightening — your hair, Lippert's legs or this launch. I've got to think about this."

At home and abroad, Obama has used his first 100 days to signal a change from his predecessors, and he is drawing on his strength outside Washington to turn his plans into policy. But Washington, where for years parochial interests have shaped the agenda and incremental steps have marked the pace, is also working on him as he turns to the next phase of what he intends to be a transformational presidency.

"President Clinton bought into the idea very early in his administration that 'the system' could only handle one thing at a time," said a senior adviser who also worked in the last Democratic administration. "President Obama decided very early on to lay out as much as possible and move ahead. The jury is still out on whether that is going to be successful."

DEFINING MOMENT

How It Came Down to This: 244 Democrats, 0 Republicans

By PERRY BACON JR.
Washington Post Staff Writer

Reps. Michael N. Castle (Del.) and Fred Upton (Mich.) sat side by side in the House chamber during the final vote on the economic stimulus package, each exhausted by the barrage of rhetoric from Democrats and fellow Republicans.

The longtime friends, both moderates in an increasingly polarized House, were two of about 10 Republicans who had signaled they would even consider backing the bill at the center of President Obama's agenda.

The measure's passage in the House on that day in February was ensured, but Obama had campaigned on reducing division in Washington and wanted to secure at least some GOP support. House Republican leaders sought to reject the bill with a unified no.

That left Castle and Upton in the middle, enduring numerous meetings and calls from Obama aides and House GOP leaders. Castle had been invited to two Super Bowl parties: Vice President Biden's at the Naval Observatory and Obama's at the White House. Citing family commitments, he declined both.

But Upton, who also had been invited to the White House, brought his 17-year-old son, Stephen, to watch the game with Obama and other Washington officials.

"It was like going to the neighbor whose house you always wanted to be invited to who has the best TV on the block," Upton said of the bash.

He also rode on Air Force One a few days later when he joined the president on a trip to Elkhart, Ind., a town just south of Upton's district. The president had taken to the road to appeal to Congress to

quickly pass his proposal.

House Republican leaders focused on the battles of Upton's home district in Michigan, the heart of the ailing automobile industry. The congressman and Rep. Candice S. Miller, another moderate Republican from Michigan, had pushed an \$11.5 billion provision that would allow tax breaks for new-car purchases, a proposal they hoped would spur sales.

But the final bill included only \$1.6 billion for the program, so on the day of the vote GOP leaders arranged for Miller to introduce a measure that would increase the funding. That was going to be hard, given that House Democrats had negotiated the exact amount of the overall stimulus bill with the Senate. Democrats rejected the effort.

House Minority Whip Eric Cantor (Va.), the man leading the GOP opposition to the package, was also aware that securing Castle and Upton's votes might hinge on making sure that no other Republicans backed the legislation. So in the hours before the vote, Cantor and other GOP leaders were in constant contact with possible GOP supporters of the bill, such as Rep. Anh "Joseph" Cao (La.), a newcomer from New Orleans who defeated incumbent William J. Jefferson (D) in a special election in an Obama stronghold. They explained their concerns about the stimulus package and stressed the importance of opposing it.

Once the voting officially started, most members of Congress quickly cast their votes and then stood in the front of the chamber with their colleagues.

But Castle and Upton just sat beside each other in the center aisle, chatting and taking in the moment.

When a House GOP leader ap-

proached to remind them again how important it was to oppose the bill, Upton says he told him to "leave us alone."

Instead, as the clock ran down on the 15 minutes that members are allotted to vote on a measure, the pair realized that several other members — Democrats and Republicans — were staring at them.

"The spotlight was on us," Upton joked. "We were enjoying our 15 minutes of fame."

Finally they cast their votes. Both men said they had largely settled on "no" days before, believing that the country needed a fiscal stimulus measure but that the legislation before them included too much spending on efforts that would not directly improve the economy.

"A good stimulus package is something we should have done, my feeling was that program was not well put together," Castle said.

Neither Castle nor Upton was sure that all 177 Republicans would oppose the bill. They realized quickly, however, the impact that a unified opposition would have.

Castle is not a cynic about bipartisanship, saying that he thinks the White House is sincere about bipartisanship and hopes it continues to reach out, but that he has no illusions about Democrats or Republicans in Washington: "I'm not giving the Republicans a lot of credit for being particularly bipartisan over the years, either."

Of the Democrats, he added: "Sometimes it's a lot easier to call Nancy Pelosi and Senator [Harry M.] Reid and say, 'Let's get this done,' and not worry about scurrying up Republicans. I would imagine the vote on the stimulus didn't help, because they worked that and they didn't get anything, so why bother?"



Meeting the press after the stimulus bill passed the House without a single GOP vote, Rep. Candice Miller (Mich.) talks alongside fellow Republican lawmakers, from left, Mike Pence (Ind.), John Boehner (Ohio) and Eric Cantor (Va.).

STIMULUS

Last year, Obama itemized actions he would take to recharge the economy. The \$785 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act contained many of these ideas, rejected others and inserted new ones such as Head Start funding and more help for unemployed workers.

SOURCE: Blueprint for Change

KEY PLEDGES	Fulfilled	Partly	No
Taxes and tax credits			
Windfall profits tax to fund a \$1,000 emergency energy rebate			Removed from the agenda before Obama was in office
Tax cut of \$500 per taxpayer or \$1,000 per family		A two-year credit of \$400 or \$800	
Tax credit for the first \$4,000 of college education, in return for 100 hours of community service		A maximum of \$2,500 partly refundable tax credit, to expire in 2010, with no community service requirement	
Refundable child care tax credit		Made more of the credit refundable	
Mortgage credit of 10% to people who don't itemize		Not in stimulus but has been proposed elsewhere	
Create tax credit for hiring new workers		Rejected by lawmakers as unworkable	
Nearly double the write-off for small-business investments	Got exactly what he wanted		
Eliminate capital gains on small business	Removes capital gains on 75% of small-business profits		

Spending	Included in the stimulus?
\$25 billion aid to states to replace state and local property taxes	\$40 billion (schools), \$8.8 billion (other services) \$86 billion (extra Medicaid matching funds)
\$25 billion for repairing schools and rebuilding roads and bridges, promising 1 million jobs	Nearly \$100 billion in infrastructure and construction spending, promising 400,000 jobs
Another \$25 billion in loan guarantees for auto industry retooling	The retooling money was not passed, but other help was given to automakers
Extend unemployment insurance for 13 additional weeks	Extended and increased
Penalty-free withdrawal of 401(k) and IRA money; regulation allowing delay in mandatory withdrawals	A December law mandated this change, freeing it from the stimulus bill
Increase low-income home energy assistance	Failed in Congress, but weatherization included

100 Days

ANALYSIS

From the Start, Putting a Bold Stamp on the White House

By DAN BALZ
Washington Post Staff Writer

There has been nothing tentative about President Obama's first 100 days in office. The defining characteristics of his presidency have been his appetite for leadership, the breadth of his ambitions and his determination to pass his programs in the face of united Republican opposition.

Some presidents start slowly. Obama began to lead even before he was sworn in, responding to a deepening recession by promoting an \$800 billion stimulus package designed to prevent the economy from becoming even worse. He has set in motion so many initiatives — domestic and international — that his top advisers know that one of their biggest challenges will be to prevent the many pieces of his agenda from crashing into one another before they can be enacted and begin to work.

For this fast start he has been rewarded with approval ratings that exceed those of his predecessors — two in three Americans approve of the job he is doing — and serious

questions about the long-term implications of his multifront agenda. As historian Robert Dallek noted, "I don't think you can point to anything at the end of 100 days that will give you a clear indication of how we're going to see the president's performance at the end of four years."

No presidency is truly defined in its first 100 days, but there are clear insights into a new leader's temperament, governing style and political philosophy that can provide a guide to the future. For Obama, the transition from presidential candidate to Oval Office occupant has begun to answer some of the contradictions that persisted through his long quest for the White House.

One of those was how Obama would resolve the tension between his talk of a post-partisan governing style and the substance of an agenda that tilted clearly in the direction of liberal, activist government. "Now it's clearer that Barack Obama was actually serious about the agenda he was advancing, and now as president he's trying to move it — in fact, move it all," said William A. Galston of the Brookings Institution.

"If that means a lost opportunity for more substantive bipartisanship and a change in tone in Washington, that's a trade-off he and the people around him are willing to accept."

Obama also has answered definitively the question of which would take priority — enacting the broad agenda of health care, energy reform and education that he championed throughout the campaign or responding to the economic crisis that hit in full force as the campaign was ending. Many analysts questioned whether he could do both, given the fiscal implications they would entail. Obama has decided not to choose between them, and he used a recent speech at Georgetown University to argue the case that short-term stimulus without long-term structural reforms of major parts of the economy risks a return to bubble economics.

Given all the activity, Obama's first 100 days have often been compared to those of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933. But historian David M. Kennedy, who wrote a major work on the Depression, said Obama's opening months differ

from Roosevelt's in one important way. "They are putting things on the table now that are very comprehensive changes of the sort that Roosevelt didn't bring forward for a couple of years," Kennedy said. Roosevelt "had a general idea of what he wanted to accomplish, but it took him a while to put it all together," he added.

Obama's ambitions have been revealed through the pursuit of his agenda. His appetite for governing is clear from the way he has talked about the presidency; aides say his goal is to be a transformational president. His most revealing comments came Feb. 27 in an interview with PBS's Jim Lehrer. "I think that we are at an extraordinary moment that is full of peril, but full of possibility," Obama said. "And I think that's the time you want to be president. . . . This is when the political system starts to move effectively."

Left unresolved is the question of Obama's political ideology. His first 100 days have produced much talk but little consensus on that question. His most conservative critics call him a socialist, and other Republicans warn that he has begun a

dangerous experiment with big-government liberalism. Some Democrats describe him as progressive; White House officials see him as pragmatic, responding to the hand he was dealt.

His economic policies amount to a huge increase in government spending and a major intervention by the government into the economy — owning big stakes in financial institutions and possibly General Motors; ordering the dismissal of corporate executives; trying to set executive compensation. Whether this is seen by Obama as a necessary but distasteful response to the size of the economic problem he inherited or an underlying belief in the effectiveness of the federal government will be known only later.

Conservative strategist and writer Daniel Casse sees Obama as a moderate with liberal tendencies, but not at heart an ideologue. His ambitions, he said, may be large in scope but not necessarily in detail. By which he means: Will Obama really attempt to restructure the auto unions; will he do more than complain about executive pay?

Stylistically, Obama appears

comfortable in the presidency. One aide described the White House under Obama as a place of serious deliberation, without the chaos that sometimes descends on a new administration.

In an administration that includes major personalities such as Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, there is no doubt who is setting the tone. He is explainer in chief, advocate in chief, initiator in chief. "He believes effective communication is close to the core of an effective 21st century presidency," Galston said. "That doesn't mean that if you do it well, you'll succeed, but if you don't do it well, you won't. The jury is out on whether overexposure will set in."

Republicans disagree with the substance of Obama's economic policies and have bet that those policies will look more questionable in a year or two than they do at the moment. That is why the jury is out on much of Obama's presidency. It will be months before the public begins to judge whether he has delivered the results he is promising. But in his first 100 days, Obama has already revealed much about himself.



A top Obama aide has dismissed the idea of a 3½-month report card, yet the White House is marking the milestone.

100 DAYS AND 76 YEARS

Is FDR-Era Yardstick Still Relevant?

By PHILIP RUCKER
Washington Post Staff Writer

It was March 4, 1933, and Franklin D. Roosevelt was being sworn in as president after his Democratic Party assumed control of the levers of power in a country deeply troubled by a historic economic collapse.

Over the next 3½ months, he would amass a slew of legislative victories, help set in motion the recovery from the Great Depression and establish a new yardstick for chief executives.

Roosevelt accomplished so much during his first 100 days in office, presidential historians have said, that the period soon became the common barometer by which future presidents — including Barack Obama — would be measured.

"After the first 100 days of FDR, because so much happened, not only the laws he got passed, but he had changed the mood of the country so they felt more positive and he set the tone for what would become the administration . . . it's part of our culture to be measuring this," said historian Doris Kearns Goodwin. "It's the first measuring mark."

But as critics view President Obama's record through the 100-day prism, some historians are questioning whether the measuring point has any value.

Historian Ron Chernow, who has written biographies of Alexander Hamilton and John D. Rockefeller, said it is unfair to compare the early months of any president, including Obama's, to those of Roosevelt.

"When FDR became president, the economic situation was so dire that there was a quasi-revolutionary

atmosphere in the country," Chernow said. "So I think that that becomes an unfair yardstick by which to judge Obama. In 1933, what was ideologically possible was much greater than today simply because the degree of despair was much greater. People really don't know how far they want to push reform or how deep-seated the problems are in the country."

Presidential historian Douglas Brinkley of Rice University said there is a "100-days mania going on where all media outlets are trying to out-100-days the other."

Said Princeton historian Sean Wilentz: "Historically, it's just kind of crazy. I think it's completely artificial and of very little use in thinking about any presidency. By the same token, you can talk about what a president has been doing and how a president's early days have gone, and that to me is perfectly all right. But these benchmarks are silly."

David Axelrod, a senior adviser to Obama, calls the 100th day a made-up "Hallmark holiday" and has dismissed it as an old Washington custom of evaluating administrations. Nonetheless, the White House scheduled a presidential visit to St. Louis and a prime-time news conference to mark the occasion.

In March 2001, President George W. Bush's political adviser, Karl Rove, and chief of staff, Andrew H. Card Jr., summoned presidential historians to the White House to ask how best to present the commander in chief's record over the first 100 days, recalled one of the historians, Fred I. Greenstein of Princeton. They were "asking about the hokey 100-days stories," Greenstein said.

President John F. Kennedy was wary of being critiqued for his first 100 days. In his 1961 inaugural address, he outlined an ambitious agenda but warned: "All this will not be finished in the first 100 days. Nor will it be finished in the first 1,000 days, nor in the life of this administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin."

Goodwin, who has written about Kennedy's presidency, said that even as a candidate he chafed against the 100-day barometer. "There was a time during the campaign when he had a draft of a speech in which he put out all the goals," she said. "He slashed out the '100 days' and said: 'Make it 1,000. I don't want to be up against that mark.' But, of course, the 1,000 days would mark his life."

Within his first three months in office, for instance, Kennedy ordered the U.S. invasion of the Bay of Pigs in Cuba, which was widely regarded as a foreign policy mistake. "You wouldn't want to judge the Kennedy presidency on the basis of the Bay of Pigs alone," Wilentz said.

Still, historians said, the 100th day offers the frenetic Obama administration a moment to pause.

"The pace of life in the White House is such that you often don't get the chance to reflect on what's going on because you're moving from one crisis to another," Goodwin said. "So to the extent that we've got this marker, it may allow the people in the White House to be able to think about why the things that worked went well and how can we improve them and, where we made mistakes, how can we avoid doing them again."

WHAT HISTORIANS SAY

We surveyed an assortment of presidential historians, who arrived at the same conclusion: President Obama, in both the scope of his legislative achievements and the groundwork he has set for future policy changes, has done more in his first 100 days in the White House than any commander in chief since Franklin D. Roosevelt, who entered office in 1933 amid the throes of the nation's last major economic upheaval. Here are selected quotations from historians and other observers.

AMBITIOUS » "There is a mixture of boldness and measuredness about his performance. He's asking for the sun, the moon and the stars. . . . It's enormously ambitious in many ways, and that makes you think back to the last real economic-disaster presidency, which was Franklin D. Roosevelt."

— Fred I. Greenstein, historian at Princeton University and author of "The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style From FDR to George W. Bush"

QUICK SUCCESS » "History will judge that he has been astonishingly successful in his first 100 days. The stimulus package helped push major investment in education and health care and seems to have stemmed the collapse of our economy. His push for education reform is going to have a lasting impact on America's education system. The ability to open up and deal directly with adversaries around the world transforms the way we conduct foreign policy and could lead to important breakthroughs, whether in Cuba or Iran. And he has set a tone that is both open yet also persistent in pursuing his goals."

— Walter Isaacson, president of the Aspen Institute and author of biographies of Albert Einstein, Benjamin Franklin and Henry Kissinger

TOO EARLY TO TELL » "He's done well, but in a lot of areas you just can't tell. . . . On the most important issue facing the country today, which is not just the economy but the banks and how to deal with the banking crisis and the credit crisis, I think we're still a long way from knowing how that will play itself out."

— Sean Wilentz, historian at Princeton University and author of "The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008"

FAST START » "When you look at the Roosevelt administration, Roosevelt moved very quickly, too, to try to set the country back on economic footing. My sense is that Barack Obama has moved as quickly or more quickly as anybody in American history, given the crises he has confronted."

— Ronald Walters, historian and director of the African American Leadership Center at the University of Maryland



President Franklin D. Roosevelt — who, like President Obama, faced a major economic crisis — delivers his first radio "fireside chat" in March 1933.

INTERNATIONAL APPEAL » "I think he's the global president. People all over the world just want to shake his hand, they want to have a photo op with him. There's a sense that he's a historic figure, not just a one-termer. . . . His mettle hasn't really been tested in foreign affairs yet, but he's created a foundation with which to work with other countries in the world quite well."

— Douglas Brinkley, historian at Rice University and editor of President Ronald Reagan's White House diaries

NEW IDEAS » "Across the board, he has signaled a willingness to rethink even deeply entrenched policies. There is a freshness and openness about this administration that is very engaging. If you just look at what happened with Cuba this week in terms of how many American presidents have been frozen in fear on the subject of Cuba, and then suddenly Obama is able to suggest a thaw and a rethinking of our policy toward Cuba and a relaxation of our attitude. . . . I think that he's been very fearless and not bound by old orthodoxies. I think that the speed with which he changed the policy on stem cell research shows how open he is to new ideas."

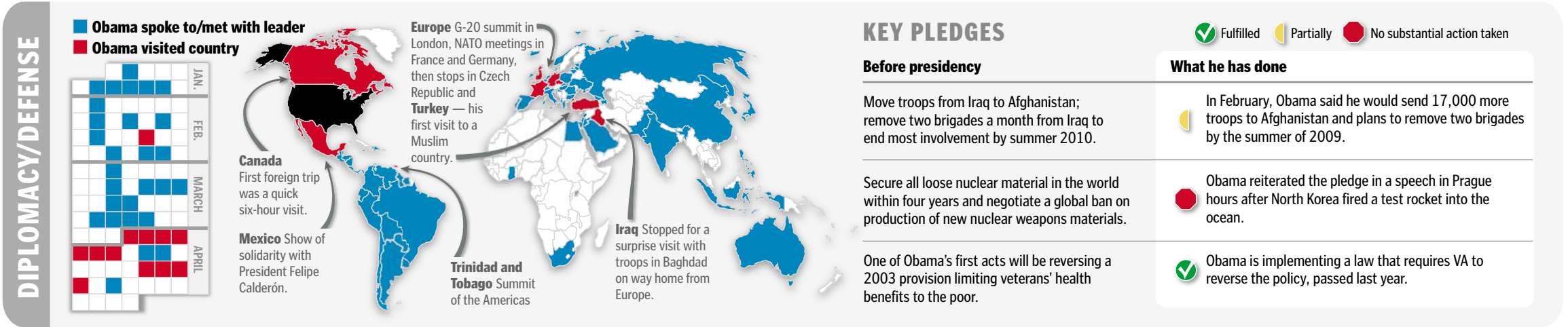
— Ron Chernow, historian and author of biographies of Alexander Hamilton and John D. Rockefeller

EASY MANNER » "I think we've learned important things about him. When he's made a misstep, as he did with [Thomas A.] Daschle, he took the responsibility for it, which means you learn what went wrong so you don't do it again. He's trying to figure out many ways of communicating with the country, because that's his ultimate strength. We've learned that he knows how to relax and enjoy himself and really figure out ways to replenish his energies, whether it's making sure that his schedule fits his needs by making time for his children at breakfast, going out to dinners with his wife in Washington, the basketball bracket."

— Doris Kearns Goodwin, historian and author of "Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln"

OUTREACH » "I'd give him an A for effort and a B for effectiveness. He's had a difficult time working both sides of the aisle. He's tried to reach out to the opposition, not with a great deal of success. He hasn't been quite as successful and effective as I would like to see, but even with that I give him a great deal of credit for the effort he's made and his willingness to reach across the aisle and not be partisan in everything."

— Edna Greene Medford, historian at Howard University who specializes in 19th-century African American history



CAPITAL COMMITMENT

Making Themselves At Home Beyond the White House Walls

By RICHARD LEIBY
Washington Post Staff Writer

The worker bees of federal Washington — people like Mazzie Simmons of Waldorf, who commutes 30 miles to her desk as a retirement specialist at the Office of Personnel Management — don't expect to hear high praise from the White House, or from anyone else, for that matter. "Nobody ever comes to say, 'Thank you for what you people do,'" she says.

Until, that is, Michelle Obama dropped by the agency last week, shook hands with hundreds of civil servants and lauded their dedication. In her 35 years in government, Simmons had never seen such a thing. Obama, a political rock star and fashion sensation worldwide, impressed Simmons as a down-to-earth woman who has "the interest of people at heart."

It was the ninth time the first lady had come to a federal agency, always to tumultuous welcome, to deliver a pep talk. From the auditorium stage, she told the bureaucrats that such visits give her the chance "to better understand not just the work that you do but the lives that you live."

Political hype? To a degree. But in their extraordinary outreach to ordinary local people, the Obamas have made themselves known to Washington in a way that no first couple has in modern memory — crossing lines of race, class and power since moving into the White House.

"It's been nothing short of incredible," says Mayor Adrian Fenty. "It's really an unprecedented level of energy and commitment to Washington, D.C., and the issues that are important to the people who live here. It brings an excitement to the city that I haven't seen before, and I've lived here my whole life."

Locals know that Washington isn't one city but three. There is the federal core with its marble monuments and hives of government toilers. There are the leafy enclaves of the prosperous class, mainly in Northwest. And then there's the sprawling "other" Washington where poverty and crime persist.

Together or separately, the president and his wife have paid attention to all three — but considerably more than their predecessors to low-income neighborhoods. They've staged events at public schools and community centers. On the service day held before the inauguration, he wielded a paintbrush at Sasha Bruce Youthwork, an emergency shelter for teens; last month she dished out risotto to the homeless at Miriam's Kitchen.

And today, Michelle Obama has invited Jill Biden and a small army of congressional spouses and kids to bag food at the Capital Area Food Bank for distribution to a thousand school children who depend on the program to eat.

Besides do-gooder events, the first couple are also prone to spontaneous, we're-just-folks outings: There's the president sitting courtside at Verizon Center, watching the Chicago Bulls; there's the first lady and her staff having burgers at Five Guys in Dupont Circle. Michelle Obama also expands her social circle on the weekends, cheering on her daughters at soccer and basketball games along with other parents.

"They are trying to become familiar with all of Washington," says longtime resident and Democratic



Reaching out, getting a hand: The first lady gardens at the White House with a Bancroft Elementary student. Top, the president takes in a Wizards-Bulls game.

strategist Donna Brazile. "They're good neighbors."

Not long after his election, Barack Obama spoke of wanting to "open up the White House," and his wife talked of "contributing to the community." As first ladies often do, Michelle Obama has taken up the mantle of goodwill emissary and cheerleader for her husband's agenda. Doing so has pushed her to the fore-

front of community engagement. Along with introducing herself to thousands of federal workers, she has invited several hundred kids from low-income neighborhoods to White House events.

At a White House bill-signing in February, Brazile says she approached Michelle Obama and said, "Madame first lady, don't forget Anacostia. Many people often forget

about the kind of places where we grew up."

As African Americans who did community and nonprofit work in Chicago, the Obamas were already inclined to push themes of public service and volunteerism. But as outsiders, they needed connections to help turn words into deeds. How do you find the youth conservation group to plant trees with in Kenil-

worth, as they did last week? Or settle on the SEED public boarding school in Southeast as an exemplar of education for urban kids? One important hire was Jocelyn Frye, a Washington native and classmate of Michelle Obama's at Harvard Law School. Frye serves in a dual role: as a domestic policy adviser to the president and director of policy and projects for the first lady. She



BY PRESTON KERES — THE WASHINGTON POST

describes herself as part of the "connective tissue" between the East and West wings.

"The outreach starts with both of them; it is part of their style," Frye says. "When she and her family moved here they didn't just want to sit behind four walls. They wanted to get out."

Frye spent 15 years at the nonprofit National Partnership for Women and Families in Washington. She is among the few administration staffers with lobbying backgrounds who received exemptions from its non-lobbyist hiring policy.

Now her work includes finding places where a visit or activity by the first lady will tie into a broader theme or agenda. "It's easy to write down on a piece of paper that you want to inspire people; it's harder to make that real," she says. Frye put at least three local sites on Michelle Obama's radar: Miriam's Kitchen at 24th and G streets NW, Mary's Center for Maternal and Child Care in Adams Morgan, and Anacostia High School — all of which the first lady visited. (Frye also suggested two lunch spots Michelle Obama went to with local leaders: B. Smith's and Georgia Brown's.)

In her remarks, particularly to young people, Obama invariably stresses the importance of diligence and personal responsibility. She tells of being an ordinary girl growing up in a working-class family on Chicago's South Side — but look where she is now, thanks to hard work.

"I have, in some way, been where you are, because, you know, I didn't come into this position with a lot of wealth, with a lot of resources," she told a group of mostly Latino teens in an after-school program at Mary's Center in February. "There is no magic dust that was sprinkled on my head or on Barack's head. We were kids much like you who figured out one day that our fate was in our own hands."

"... I feel like it's an obligation for me to share some of that with you. If it's as simple as sitting around in a circle answering questions or being in a room shaking a hand or giving a hug or reading a story, I want you all to see me and to see Barack, and to have access to whatever we can offer."

After reading to children in a day-care classroom that afternoon, Obama learned that some 80 other staffers had hoped to meet her, too, before she went to talk with the teenagers. But the Secret Service had a problem: Only 15 of the center's management types had been cleared. The solution: Cafeteria tables were lined up in the kitchen to serve as an impromptu barrier that Obama could reach across to proffer handshakes and photo opportunities to everyone, including janitors.

"She made it very personal," says Mary's Center CEO Maria Gomez, a public health nurse who founded the clinic in 1988.

The Obamas' focus on local service groups, as opposed to national ones, has had a multiplier effect. The publicity inspires volunteers and donations. In her 35 years working with teens in crisis, says Deborah Shore, executive director of Sasha Bruce Youthwork, a president had never visited. After Obama did, the number of volunteer calls rose fivefold. "It makes such a difference, really," she says.

The same is true at Mary's Center. And over at Miriam's Kitchen, an entirely new crew of volunteers is expected to arrive soon: members of the first lady's own staff.

