

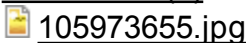


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[Home](#) > [Geithner becomes an unlikely bridge between Obama, GOP](#)

Geithner becomes an unlikely bridge between Obama, GOP

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 [105973655.jpg](#) For the most politically fraught negotiations pending in Congress, President Obama dispatched an emissary so disliked by Republicans that they frequently demand his resignation.

Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner, author of a \$700 billion Wall Street bailout, the \$814 billion stimulus and more, is leading the White House lobbying effort to break a stalemate with Republicans over extending Bush-era tax cuts.

"I think on the tax issue, he is representative of the president and I know Republicans are seriously trying to reach common ground," said Rep. Kevin Brady, R-Texas and a member of the Joint Economic Committee and critic of Geithner's tenure. "But his problem is he has a relationship gap the size of the Grand Canyon and it's going to take a great deal of work to overcome that."

Deploying Geithner to the Hill achieves two things for Obama: It shows he is serious by sending a Cabinet member. And he sends a strong message that Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is not speaking for him this time.

Still, it's hard to find another administration official whose policies so consistently enrage Republicans.

"He has not been rehabbed, there is not a lot of love on Capitol Hill for Geithner," said Brian Darling, director of government relations at the Heritage Foundation. "He is also not a person who members perceive as someone who will be at Treasury a long time."

Geithner since the earliest days of the Obama administration has been a lightning rod. While some Democrats have issues with the secretary, Republicans have been far more outspoken.

In an infamous exchange a year ago between Brady and Geithner at a hearing of the Joint Economic Committee, Brady told the secretary that "the public has lost all confidence in your ability to do the job."

For many on Capitol Hill, Geithner is the personification of costly Obama administration policies that have failed to significantly improve the economy.

"It seems to me the president has a very shallow bench when it comes to economic advisers,"

said Republican strategist Alex Conant, "But it's not just a personnel problem, it's a policy problem -- and while Geithner is not a great messenger, the problem is their message is really bad."

In August, Geithner published an op-ed in the New York Times headlined, "Welcome to the Recovery," touching off a fresh round of bile and scorn.

The White House consistently defends Geithner, and says Obama considers his job secure.

"He came in with a lot of baggage," said George Edwards III, a political scientist at Texas A&M University. "But it seems to me he is doing a lot better now."

For some, Geithner's perceived affinity for the markets and his apparent willingness to negotiate on tax cuts are harbingers of better times for the treasury secretary.

"At least Geithner can talk the talk," said Mark Calabria, a political expert at the Cato Institute and a former Republican Senate staffer. "I think the administration is going to start relying on just a handful of people who can talk with Republicans, and Geithner will be one of them."

Added Calabria, "You can't have Ray LaHood doing everything," referring to Obama's transportation secretary, a Republican.

jmason@washingtonexaminer.com

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