



## Trump names Chao to Transportation

Ai Heping and Chen Weihua

November 30, 2016

President-elect Donald Trump on Tuesday named Elaine Chao, the former secretary of labor, to be his choice for transportation secretary.

Chao, the first American woman of Asian descent to be appointed to a president's cabinet when she was named by President George W. Bush as labor secretary, is the wife of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

If confirmed by the Senate, she would be expected to play a key role in Trump's plan to get Congress to approve \$1 trillion for rebuilding the nation's roads, bridges and other parts of the nation's infrastructure and public transit systems. Republicans in Congress have resisted the Obama administration's attempt to fund an infrastructure program.

Trump on Tuesday also chose Georgia Representative Tom Price to lead the Department of Health and Human Services nation's health care system. Price has been a strong critic of Obamacare and a main supporter of efforts to privatize Medicare. He helped draft House Speaker Paul Ryan's plan to privatize Medicare, a position Trump opposed in the campaign.

Chao's nomination was greeted with support from foreign policy experts.

Douglas Paal, vice-president for studies and director of the Asia program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, described Chao as "deeply experienced in transportation and an admirable selection to be transportation secretary".

"As an ethnic Chinese-American with Taiwan connections as well as mainland roots, she has involved herself for decades in Sino-US relations," Paal said. "I hope the officials responsible for US foreign and security policy will pay attention to her insights."

Ted Carpenter, a senior fellow of defense and foreign policy at the Cato Institute, said the appointment of Chao will be one of Trump's less controversial selections.

"Given her previous role as a cabinet member in George W. Bush's administration, the choice of Chao seems to be a conciliatory gesture to 'establishment' factions within the Republican Party," he said.

Carpenter said the appointment also will be greeted warmly in China, but that given the nature of the post, it will not have a major impact on relations.

The Chinese government and people will pay far more attention to other appointments, most notably secretary of state, secretary of defense, the assistant secretaries of state and defense for East Asia and the Pacific, and US trade representative, he said. Those appointments will have much greater relevance for bilateral relations, according to Carpenter.

Zhiqun Zhu, a professor of political science and international relations at Bucknell University, said Trump's pick of Chao has little to do with China or US-China relations.

"She was picked mainly because of her multiple identities: a veteran Republican politician, a woman, an immigrant, and a Washington insider," Zhu said, adding that the fact that Chao is married to Mitch McConnell, Senate majority leader, may also be very helpful for Trump to smooth his relations with Congress.

However, Zhu said that Trump has an ambitious plan to revamp America's dilapidated infrastructure. "Chao's ties to China could be useful to bringing in Chinese investment and construction-related businesses to help rebuild America's infrastructure in the next few years," he said.

Chao served as the 24th US secretary of Labor from 2001-2009. She served the longest in that post since World War II, and the only member of Bush's original cabinet to have served the entire eight years of his administration.

It was Bush's father, George H. W. Bush, who as president in 1989 named Chao deputy secretary of transportation. In 1991, he named her Peace Corps director.

After leaving government service in 1992, Chao served as president and CEO of the United Way of America. She left United Way in 1996 and joined the Heritage Foundation as a distinguished fellow.