

Biden Taps Diverse Trade Team To Aid Transition Process

November 10, 2020

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President-elect Joe Biden will rely on a diverse roster of business, labor and legal experts to help shape his trade policy, the transition team announced Tuesday, offering the first hint as to how the former vice president will take up the Trump administration's mantle in a closely watched policy area.

Biden's agency review teams for the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative and the U.S. Department of Commerce are littered with government veterans who have jumped to the private sector advocating for open markets, as well as labor advocates who have sharply criticized the trade liberalization Biden helped pursue as vice president.

The job of the review teams will be to closely observe the operations of their respective agencies and prepare Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris to enable a smooth transfer of power in January.

Leading the USTR agency review team is Jason Miller, a Brookings fellow who worked on the National Economic Council during the Obama administration, focusing mostly on manufacturing policy. The Biden campaign prioritized the revitalization of domestic production as a main component of its trade strategy.

Among the other notable names on the USTR review team are University of Miami law professor and former USTR lawyer Kathleen Claussen, former USTR intellectual property director Mark Wu, now at Harvard, and former assistant USTR Elizabeth Kelley, now at the Urban Institute.

The USTR team also includes former agency lawyer and World Trade Organization Appellate Body legal officer Arun Venkataraman, now with Visa, and former Deputy Assistant Commerce Secretary Ted Dean, now with file-hosting giant Dropbox. Also on board is Commerce and Treasury veteran Brad Setser, now with the Council on Foreign Relations, who has focused much of his writing on the impact of currency policy on trade flows.

Biden's transition team also gave a nod to labor, tapping Julie Greene of the AFL-CIO and

Celeste Drake of the Directors Guild of America.

"The people on the USTR agency review list reflect the progressive vs. moderate divide within the Democratic Party on trade issues," Cato Institute trade expert Simon Lester told Law360. "How they resolve their differences may tell us something about the direction of trade policy in the Biden administration."

When he was vice president, Biden advocated for a number of trade liberalization initiatives, like the Trans-Pacific Partnership, that drew fire from labor and the Democratic Party's progressive wing. President Donald Trump instead focused more heavily on enforcement, leaving Biden in something of an awkward political position as he prepares to take the reins of the federal government.

The USTR and Commerce review teams both include Todd Tucker, who serves as director of governance studies at the Roosevelt Institute and formerly worked on trade issues at Public Citizen, another fierce critic of Obama-era trade policies.

Biden's Commerce transition team also features Atman Trivedi, who works at the consulting firm founded by former U.S. Trade Representative Carla Hills, as well as Clifford Chance LLP attorney Joshua Berman, formerly the agency's deputy general counsel who focused on investment reviews, sanctions and cybersecurity.