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The Hotline

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A Meeting Not With Fat Cats, Just Small, Slightly Overweight Ones

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Pres. Obama "will discuss the economy, lending to small businesses and financial regulation when he sits down" at the WH today with reps. of "a dozen small and community banks." Obama "will reiterate to attendees that we all have a stake in getting the economy back on track," from the gov't "to the small and large financial institutions to the private sector," according to WH spokesperson Jennifer Psaki. Obama "plans to discuss the need to increase lending to small businesses, the housing foreclosure crisis" and "the importance of passing financial reform to local communities," Psaki said (Superville, AP, 12/22).

Wait, Wait, Don't Sign Me

"As he nears the end of his first year in office," Obama "repeatedly has fallen short on his pledge to have all bills Congress sends to him posted and open for comments for at least five days before he decides to sign them." On "32 of the 117 bills he signed" through 12/22, Obama "didn't wait the full five days after the bill reached his desk to pick up his pen" -- and the recent "omnibus and the defense appropriations bills had been posted for just two days" when Obama signed them.

According to the **Cato Institute**, on 43 of the 117 bills Obama has signed, the WH "didn't even bother to post a link to the bill or allow comments." The admin. "disputes" those numbers (Rowland, Washington Times, 12/22).

Ifs, Ands, Rebuts

In a 12/21 interview with American Urban Radio Networks' April Ryan, Obama "rebutted critics who say he isn't showing enough compassion toward black America, citing his health care effort" and the stimulus bill as examples he says "will be hugely important" for blacks.

Obama: "So this notion, somehow, that because there wasn't a transformation overnight that we've been neglectful is just simply, factually not accurate."

But Obama "acknowledged there are limits to what a president can do for any class of people." Obama: "The only thing I cannot do is, by law, I cannot pass laws that say 'I'm just helping black folks.' I'm the president of the entire United States" (Superville, AP, 12/21).

Meanwhile, Obama "is on track to name more Latinos to top posts than any of his predecessors." In "less than a year in office," Obama "has tapped at least" 50 Latinos "to positions senior enough to require Senate confirmation." That "compares with a total of 30 approved under Bill Clinton and 34 under George W. Bush during their first 20 months in office." The appointments "won't necessarily give" Obama a "free pass on issues such as immigration, but it may ease Latinos' worries about

whether Obama will continue reaching out to a group that was key to his winning" the WH (Wides-Munoz, AP, 12/22).

O, Solo Mio

Sec/State Hillary Clinton and ex-Sec/State Henry Kissinger sat down with Newsweek's Meacham for the magazine's Interview Issue. Highlights from the interview:

Clinton, on the importance of the relationship between the sec/state and the POTUS: "Oh, I think it's critically important. First of all, it's critical to the formulation of policy and the giving of advice and having the perspective of diplomacy and development at the table when decisions of moment are made. ... I meet with the president one-on-one once a week. I'm in other meetings with him with the national-security team. It's a constant conversation."

Kissinger: "I had extraordinarily close relationships with the two presidents I served. In fact, if one looks at the history of the secretaries of state, it's rare. If they don't have a close relationship, they don't last."

Clinton, on being a wartime sec/state: "It is so much easier to get resources when you are in the Defense Department than it is when you are in the State Department and USAID. ... In a time of budget constraint like we're facing now, it's just much more difficult for us to get the resources that we're expected to have, but the responsibilities still remain."

Kissinger, on the job of sec/state: "Diplomacy and foreign policy and other elements of political activity have to be closely linked and have to be understood by the negotiators. That's why Hillary has the most exciting job in the government."

Clinton: "But it's also more like a conductor than a soloist" (12/21).

The Boy In The Plastic Bubble

Newsweek's Bartholet interviews WH sr. adviser Valerie Jarrett. Asked how Obama is adjusting to "life in the bubble," Jarrett notes that the POTUS would "love nothing better than to slip away and go into an old bookstore and meet a random stranger and have a conversation. So accepting that that part of his life has changed, probably forever, has taken some getting used to, and I'd say he's still not used to it" (12/21).

Newsweek's Samuelson sits down with ex-CBO dir./ex-McCain '08 adviser Douglas Holtz-Eakin, who notes that there would likely be more bipartisanship in a McCain admin., both because "it would have been" a GOPer POTUS and a Dem Congress, but also because McCain "is more willing to disappoint" GOPers "than Obama is to disappoint" Dems. Holtz-Eakin also gave the admin. a "C-plus, maybe a B" on its short-term economic policies. Holtz-Eakin: "They deserve credit for changing perceptions" (12/21).

You Down With EKG? Yeah, You Know Me

Time's Scherer writes, as Obama "approaches the first year mark of his presidency," Dem and GOP strategists "are beginning to look more closely at the polls." Why? "Congress cares about polls," health care reform "has become a burden," the "Obama movement has gone missing," Keynes "doesn't play in Peoria," and "Washington has not changed" (12/22).

In today's **Washington Post**, George Will writes, it was "serendipitous to have

almost simultaneous climaxes in Copenhagen and Congress. The former's accomplishment was indiscernible, the latter's was unsightly." The "mountain beneath the summit -- a mountain of manufactured hysteria, predictable cupidity, antic demagoguery and dubious science -- labored mightily and gave birth to a mouselet, a 12-paragraph document committing the signatories to ... make a list." Meanwhile, on health care, "the left has almost always yielded ground. Still, to swallow the Senate bill, the House will have to swallow its pride, if it has any. The conference report reconciling the House and Senate bills will reveal whether the House is reconciled to being second fiddle in a one-fiddle orchestra" (12/22).

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