

# Clinton Aides Comfortable With Bill's Vetting, Worried About Press

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Aides and advisers to the Clintons feel comfortable that the vetting of Bill Clinton will not disqualify Hillary from becoming Secretary of State, and argue that the former president could be a tremendous asset both to his wife and Barack Obama in the future administration.

Nevertheless, there is a concern that critical media coverage could sour the Obama and Clinton camp's view of the arrangement and hurt Sen. Clinton's chances of ending up at the post.

In conversations on Monday, officials noted that Bill Clinton has long expected that much of his work during the past eight years would be opened to public scrutiny if his wife were to win the presidential election. Moreover, they added, the former president already had made a substantial share of his financial record public -- including [every paid speech](#) he has delivered since leaving the White House -- in accordance with congressional disclosure laws that impact his wife. But there still exists the possibility that a post-presidential arrangement, whether through Clinton's library or global initiative fund, could prove cosmetically problematic and spur enough of a media frenzy to scuttle things.

"The next two or three days will be critical," said one aide. Another figure close to the Clintons noted that they are focused on "trying to weather this storm... If they can limit [the press fallout] around Bill, she'll get the appointment."

Officials told the [Huffington Post](#) and [other outlets](#) last week that Obama had (informally) offered Clinton the post during their meeting in Chicago. Some subsequent media accounts stated that a formal offer had not yet been extended. But aides say that is a distinction without a difference: Clinton believes, based on her meeting with Obama, that the position is hers if she wants it; moreover, aides say, Obama's transition team would not have gone through with the vetting of the former president (nor would he have agreed to it) if the idea of Hillary at State wasn't crystal clear.

There is lingering concern over Bill Clinton. The Clinton Global Initiative has raised billions of dollars from many international financial and political entities. In addition, both he and Obama (and, on occasion, he and his wife) have had clear policy disagreements that could muddle the message of the next president.

But lost amidst these potential hurdles is another obvious element: Bill Clinton could also be, if tasked correctly, a tremendous asset to Obama, observers say. A renowned diplomat with perhaps the thickest rolodex of officials around the world, the former president could at once help amplify the White House message while serving as a friendly buffer should there be a fissure between Obama and another international leader.

Take, as a case study, negotiations over a Colombia Free Trade Agreement. Clinton has a clear interest in the passage of any such measure, [having received \\$800,000](#) in speaking fees from an organization promoting the trade deal. In addition, he has spoken out in favor of the Bush administration's approach, contradicting not only Obama but his own wife.

However, Clinton could be a huge help for President Obama should he try to restructure such an arrangement with the Colombians, as seems likely. Clinton is close to President Uribe and has myriad connections to prominent government officials, business leaders, and aid groups in the country. Any fallout between Uribe and the Obama administration could be lessened by Clinton's diplomatic touch, as could frictions that accompany negotiating trade deals or other political arrangements.

"This is the very interesting flip side of the problem people are starting to talk about with Bill Clinton," said Paul Blustein, a trade expert at the Brookings Institute. "The ideal outcome with the Colombia FTA is that it gets renegotiated so that Obama can support it without it looking like he just made cosmetic changes. At the same time, it has to be done in a way that preserves Uribe's dignity... to make sure he can also save his face. And Bill Clinton is certainly a master at that. He has a personal relationship with the two guys involved, which is obviously a big plus... He can go and say 'I feel your pain' [to Uribe] or something to that effect, and be believed. He's good at that."

Certainly, having Bill Clinton as a mediator requires some initial conditions to be met. For starters, his wife would be the one calling the shots -- having too many cooks in the diplomatic kitchen is both problematic and dangerous. Moreover, Bill would have to untangle his financial ties and start publicly adopting positions that were in line with the Obama administration. The former task would cost money -- but that is usually the price of public service. The latter is merely a matter of control and messaging.

"He doesn't have to be supportive or critical," said Rob Shapiro, an undersecretary of commerce in the Clinton White House. "If asked about the contradiction between his position and the president's he ought to say: 'I support the position of the president.' And if they say what about the difference, he should say: 'I support the position of the president.'"