

Has VP-elect Pence Been the Key to Trump's Cabinet Picks?

It seems clear from his recent public appearances that Donald Trump is taking well to the idea of becoming the next president, remaining positive during last week's first "thank-you tour" stop in Cincinnati and largely keeping out of media trouble except for a few miscellaneous tweets that have gotten the squawkers screaming.

If this is the best the Democrats and the media have to throw at Trump, the lead-up to his inauguration should be a breeze.

Not even the announcement of James "Mad Dog" Mattis as the upcoming secretary of defense generated a whole lot of comment—other than praise, that is.

One man who deserves much of the credit for the smooth and efficient transition effort is Vice President-elect Mike Pence, who, according to people in the know, has taken on an oversize role in helping Trump manage relations with Republican congressional leaders and in narrowing down the candidates for key Cabinet posts.

Eliana Johnson and Andrew Restuccia of Politico report,

During the campaign, Pence's role had been murky—even to him and his aides, who were often confused by the dueling power centers around Trump and the chaotic nature of his universe. On the campaign trail, the two men sometimes seemed out of sync. When Trump announced his running mate in July, he looked apprehensive. Their subsequent clashes on military intervention in Syria and their assessments of Vladimir Putin became a running joke on late-night television.

All that changed after Nov. 8, however, when Trump put Pence in charge of the presidential transition as his focus shifted

to assembling a government. And Pence's importance as a link between the White House and GOP lawmakers is likely to grow as Trump turns to pushing through an ambitious legislative agenda.

The Hill reporters paint a semi-flattering picture of Pence's ability to generate goodwill on Capitol Hill in both the House and Senate. Where the president-elect doesn't have a whole lot of close friends in Congress, Pence has plenty.

Needless to say, Pence will preside over the Senate and would provide the crucial tie-breaking vote in case a few wayward establishment Republicans lose their nerve on Trump appointments or the more controversial aspects of his agenda.

It's often said that a presidential party nominee's most important decision is the choice of his running mate. Mike Pence has turned out to be a winner on so many fronts that even the liberal media is praising him.

It also should not be discounted how important Pence's strong performance in the vice presidential debate (in early October) was to Trump's ultimate victory. Pence stood up when things were arguably at their worst—a "save" that could eventually be seen as historically game-changing.

Conservatives take comfort in knowing Trump trusts Mike Pence to shoulder much of the load in the transition process, and it appears as though he'll be a major player in helping Trump pass his agenda items. Together, they're a great team. {eo}

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