

Hillary Close to Picking Her Own Running Mate

WASHINGTON (Reuters) – Democrat Hillary Clinton was close on Friday to announcing a vice presidential running mate, with U.S. Senator Tim Kaine of Virginia leading a small group of contenders under consideration to help her do battle with Republican rival Donald Trump.

Another senator, Cory Booker of New Jersey, along with Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack were also among the final contenders, with Kaine having an edge, a Democratic source with knowledge of the discussions said.

Clinton's campaign declined to comment.

Clinton is expected to announce her running mate for the Nov. 8 election through a text message or Twitter, possibly as early as Friday when she has two afternoon events scheduled in Florida.

Clinton, a former secretary of state, will be formally nominated as the party's presidential candidate at next week's Democratic convention in Philadelphia. She leads Trump in many opinion polls.

The former first lady's choice of a running mate would provide a signal about her plan of battle against Trump and help give her campaign momentum as the fight for the White House enters a key stage.

Picking either Kaine or Vilsack, veteran mainstays of the Democratic establishment with plenty of governing experience, would emphasize Clinton's message that Democrats will offer a serious, steady alternative to the unpredictable Trump after the chaotic Republican convention that closed on Thursday.

Booker, a charismatic rising star in the party, could give her candidacy a jolt of energy as Clinton enters the three-month grind of the general election. Booker, 47, would be the first black vice president and could help boost turnout among young and African-American voters.

CLINTON SHORT LIST

Other potential contenders on Clinton's short list included U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, a liberal favorite, Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper and Hispanic Cabinet members Julian Castro and Thomas Perez.

The Wall Street Journal, citing Democrats familiar with the search, said she was likely to make the announcement on Friday and Kaine was believed to be the pick.

Clinton spent Wednesday and Thursday at home in New York to consider her vice presidential choice. She has repeatedly said the question of who would make a good president if required to step in was at the forefront of her search.

"I am afflicted with the responsibility gene, and I know what it's like being president," she told Charlie Rose of CBS News and PBS earlier in the week. "So for me there is nothing more important than my rock-solid conviction that the person I choose could literally get up one day and be the president of the United States."

The well-liked Kaine could meet those qualifications. Before entering the U.S. Senate he had been the mayor of Richmond, governor of Virginia and chairman of the Democratic National Committee.

Kaine, 58, is a fluent Spanish speaker after serving as a missionary in Honduras, and his presence on the ticket could help Clinton in Virginia, a heavily contested swing state.

Amy Dudley, a spokeswoman for Kaine, said the senator will in

Boston on Friday for a long-scheduled fundraiser. She would not comment on whether Kaine had any other travel plans on Friday or this weekend.

Trump concluded the Republican convention on Thursday night with an acceptance speech denouncing Clinton's legacy of "death, destruction, terrorism and weakness" as U.S. secretary of state.

The convention underscored Trump's struggle to heal fissures in the Republican Party over his rhetoric on immigration and concerns about his temperament. The event was boycotted by many big-name establishment Republicans.

Clinton has faced her own struggle unifying Democrats and winning over liberal backers of Democratic primary rival Bernie Sanders, a U.S. senator from Vermont. A choice of Kaine would not help that effort.

Liberal groups have pressured Clinton to avoid Kaine, who backs the Pacific free-trade deal known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Critics of the deal, including Trump and Sanders, say it would be unfair to U.S. workers and kill jobs.

Clinton praised the deal when she was secretary of state, but now opposes it.

(Editing by Alistair Bell)

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