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New White House chief of staff brings discipline

Tom Gallagher | Apr. 12, 2013 NCR Today

Over at Bloomberg News [1], there's a story about President Barack Obama's new chief of staff, Denis McDonough, and his efforts to manage the disparate operations of the White House:

It's 7:45 a.m. in White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough's office and about a dozen senior aides are focusing on two flat-screen monitors with PowerPoint slides.

Legislative director Miguel Rodriguez is running today's dashboard -- McDonough's term for a slide presentation on various topics -- and going over the names of President Barack Obama's cabinet nominees awaiting confirmation. A green arrow pointing up is good. A yellow horizontal arrow spells trouble. Red arrows pointing down have so far been avoided.

On this day, Obama's choice for budget director, Sylvia Mathews Burwell, has a green arrow next to her name, yet there's a potential problem. Her confirmation hearings will coincide with the release of Obama's budget, giving Republicans an opening to pose some probing questions. The slide alerts the economic, communications and legislative teams to coordinate and avoid any surprises that could jeopardize her chances.

"What Denis is doing is making sure that two trains don't run into each other," said Dan Pfeiffer, a senior adviser to Obama. "He's allowing everyone to see the whole field."

McDonough, 43, has brought the discipline of the White House's Situation Room, where he helped monitor the hunt for Osama bin Laden, to the chief of staff's office. His dashboard meetings illustrate why Obama chose his loyal and technocratic deputy national security adviser as the West Wing's chief operating officer for the president's second term.

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[1] http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-04-12/mcdonough-brings-order-to-west-wing-to-press-obama-agenda.html