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From: Cheryl Mills [redacted]
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Subject: Obama picks financial backer for UK ambassador post

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<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/may/20/obama-uk-ambassador-louis-susman>

Obama picks financial backer for UK ambassador post Chicago friend Louis Susman chosen for plum posting despite president's promise to end cronyism in Washington Ewen MacAskill in Washington Wednesday May 20 2009
guardian.co.uk

A little bit of Chicago's ruthless and combative political machine is soon to descend on the decorous calm of the Court of St James. Despite promising to end cronyism in Washington, Barack Obama is about to appoint one of his home town friends and financial backers to the plum posting of US ambassador to London.

The next ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary will be Louis Susman, a lawyer and financier with little experience of foreign affairs.

The appointment will end months of speculation. Susman's name first surfaced in a diary column in the Washington Post in February, but Caroline Kennedy was also mentioned, as was Oprah Winfrey, another of Obama's Chicago supporters.

There was no official confirmation of Susman's nomination today, but the Guardian has learned that the paperwork has been completed. Buckingham Palace approved the appointment this month and Obama will announce it shortly.

London has become a retirement posting for many backers of US presidents, offering a comfortable home in one of the best mansions in the city, Winfield House in Regent's Park.

Recent ambassadors have been political appointees more interested in country walks than Iraq or nuclear non-proliferation. Most of the work is left to the number twos at the embassy, career diplomats.

Susman, 71, a vice-president of Citigroup until he retired in February, has long been a backer of the Democrats, nicknamed the Vacuum Cleaner by the Chicago Tribune for his ability to Hoover up campaign funding. "I don't think anyone enjoys raising money, but for some reason I seem to have a knack," he told the paper. Susman, who lives in an expensive neighbourhood of Chicago overlooking Lake Michigan, raised at least \$500,000 (?\$20,000) for Obama's campaign and a further \$300,000 for his inauguration.

He is so much a part of Obama's inner circle that he was invited to an exclusive party on the Sunday before the inauguration. Other guests included Rahm Emanuel, Obama's chief of staff, who typifies the sharp-suited, foul-mouthed approach of those brought up on Chicago politics.

London is not the only posting being used to reward political supporters.

Other positions in Europe are expected to be filled on the basis of patronage. Dan Rooney, owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers football team, who campaigned for Obama, is to be the ambassador to Dublin.

The appointments will disappoint former US career diplomats who have been pressing Obama to end the practice, especially since he promised to offer more of the top jobs to diplomats. In the Washington Post in December, a retired diplomat with 30 years' service, Morton Abramowitz, called on Obama to "declare that he will not appoint ambassadors who have secured their posts through financial contributions and who have little background to merit any such appointment".

Ronald Neumann, a former career diplomat and ambassador and president of the Washington-based American Academy of Diplomacy, wrote to Obama last year, saying ambassadors should have had experience of the country they are being appointed to. Neumann said today: "You would think with our most important ally we might occasionally send someone with some experience."

Historically, about 25% to 30% of the diplomatic posts have been political appointees. It is too early to say, but Obama's ratio could yet be lower.

The president's choice of Susman could be viewed as a snub to the UK. The relationship between the Obama administration and the UK government got off to a bad start. At least one member of the administration was irritated over the leaking during the campaign of a memo from the British ambassador, Sir Nigel Sheinwald, assessing Obama as "aloof". But the minor rows over the memo, the removal of the Churchill bust from the Oval office, the DVD present to Gordon Brown and other perceived slights have been presentational problems rather than a sign of ruptured relations.

Obama's predecessor, George W Bush, sent two of his financier backers to the UK: William Farish, a Texas multimillionaire, and Robert Tuttle, a California car dealer. The lack of an experienced diplomat in London was felt most in the runup to the war in Iraq in 2003, with Farish invisible when a figure was needed to put the US case on camera and in print.

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