

RELEASE IN FULL

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Sent: Monday, July 25, 2011 5:17 PM
To: H
Subject: FW: Don't cry for Palmer, Venezuela

See Venezuela and WHA reference

From: Toiv, Nora F
Sent: Monday, July 25, 2011 5:14 PM
To: Mills, Cheryl D
Subject: Don't cry for Palmer, Venezuela

I assume I am way behind on this but wanted to make sure you saw.

The Washington Post

Don't cry for Palmer, Venezuela

By Al Kamen, Published: July 19

The long, occasionally nasty tussle over who's going to be the U.S. ambassador to Venezuela is far from over. But Washington's first choice, career diplomat **Larry Palmer**, doesn't look to be going to Caracas anytime soon.

The latest word is that Palmer, whose nomination was accepted and then rejected by Venezuelan President **Hugo Chavez**, is going to be nominated instead to be ambassador to Barbados, and the administration is looking for another Foreign Service officer to send to Venezuela.

Some might see this as a victory for the ailing autocrat, though folks here are not looking at it that way, saying Palmer, in the end, wasn't confirmable and wouldn't have been a credible ambassador to Venezuela.

As we noted in February, the mercurial Chavez signed off on the nomination last summer. Palmer's Senate hearing, however, raised concerns that he wasn't forceful enough on Chavez's human rights abuses. But when Palmer took a harder line in post-hearing questions, Chavez withdrew his consent and refused to accept Palmer.

Chavez relented after some diplomatic activity but then changed his mind after an anti-Chavez bomber escaped from prison and got a visa to come here. There again seemed to be some progress on the matter, but former State Department spokesman **P.J. Crowley** publicly called Chavez "autocratic" and dictatorial, which upset the mercurial autocrat yet again.

At the end of last year, Washington told Venezuelan Ambassador **Bernardo Alvarez Herrera** not to come back. So now he's happily in Madrid. And Palmer, who wasn't renominated to the Caracas job, could soon be happily in Bridgetown.

The State Department is looking for candidates for Venezuela. As we said in February, there may not be an ambassador anytime soon.

Quito, anyone?

Speaking of diplomatic matters and Latin America, the administration is looking for someone to replace former assistant secretary for Western Hemisphere affairs **Arturo Valenzuela**, who's gone back to academia.

There had been talk that career diplomat **Kristie Kenney**, who's been ambassador to Ecuador, might be in line for the job, but she recently arrived in Thailand, and things there are a bit too unstable politically to yank her out just now.

Jose Fernandez, a Cuban American and political appointee now serving as assistant secretary of state for economic matters, also had been talked about for the job, but apparently the brass want to leave him where he is.

Best bet is there'll be a long interregnum, with **Roberta Jacobson**, a career civil servant and veteran Latin America hand who had been top deputy to Valenzuela, holding the fort.

GOP sources say the White House has been floating the name of **Art Estopinan**, longtime chief of staff to House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman **Ileana Ros-Lehtinen** (R-Fla.), as a possible pick for the job.

The notion seems a bit unlikely, given that Estopinan's views on Cuba and other matters in Latin America might be a bit at odds with some of the administration's policies in the region.

On the other hand, we are approaching an election year, after all, and the Cuban American Estopinan just happens to be from Florida.

Still, we're told the White House is giving Secretary of State **Hillary Rodham Clinton** final say on a replacement for Valenzuela.

So much for urban renewal

Looks as if the senior staff at the Department of Housing and Urban Development — forced to move out of the top floor of HUD headquarters in Southwest Washington because of concerns that the building's roof could collapse — is going to be displaced for up to five months. That's longer than we had reported Monday.

The 10th floor of the 43-year-old building, home to Secretary **Shaun Donovan**, Deputy Secretary **Ron Sims** and about 300 staffers, was evacuated after it was discovered that structural supports are beginning to fail.

Some staffers have been relocated in the building or in other facilities or are working from home. Initial estimates of the time for repairs were a couple of months.

Look who's talking

As expected, Defense Secretary **Leon Panetta** on Tuesday named two veteran communications experts to be spokesmen for the department: Navy Capt. **John Kirby**, who had been the top communications aide to Joint Chiefs Chairman Adm. **Mike Mullen**, and **George Little**, who has most recently been the CIA's director of public affairs during Panetta's tenure.

Both will serve in the office of public affairs, which is headed by Assistant Secretary **Douglas Wilson**. Kirby is to be deputy assistant secretary of defense/spokesman and director of media operations, and Little's title is deputy assistant secretary of defense/press secretary.

The daily briefings are expected to rotate among Wilson, Kirby and Little.

Or was it the Winklevosses?

Some congressional Web sites have been looking better in recent years, going from stodgy, rudimentary offerings to snappy-looking interactive experiences. Much of the credit for that may go to **Tim Hysom** at the Congressional Management Foundation, a nonprofit, nonpartisan operation that was set up to help Capitol Hill offices more effectively interact with constituents.

Unfortunately, the CMF is having trouble raising money in these tough times and Hysom, in a farewell e-mail last week, said he's staying on for a bit on a part-time basis and looking for full-time work.

Moving on

Charles Rose, a veteran Chicago lawyer who's been general counsel at the Education Department, heads back to private practice, signing on with Drinker Biddle & Reath, which has offices here and in Chicago.

All the best

What sets this great democracy apart from other nations is our ability to wage a bitter, even nasty election fight and, when the voters have spoken, to graciously acknowledge defeat. But that's so old-school.

Now there's the more modern "concession" statement such as the one last week from the National Republican Congressional Committee's communications director, **Paul Lindsay**, after Democratic candidate **Janice Hahn** defeated GOP candidate Craig Huey in the special election for the House seat once held by **Jane Harman** (D-Calif.).

"Janice Hahn is now **Nancy Pelosi**'s problem," Lindsay said. "Between her pattern of unethical behavior and close ties to LA's most dangerous gang members, Hahn is adding to the pollution in the swamp of Washington corruption."

Could be the beginning of a whole new genre.

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