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Hillary Clinton, citing her job, will skip DNC in Charlotte; Bill Clinton, however, plans to attend the convention By Tim Funk Friday, Apr. 06, 2012 The Charlotte Observer

At the Democratic convention four years ago, her spirited speech helped unite the party behind Barack Obama. And four years from now, many Democrats hope she'll be the White House nominee delegates rally around.

But as for the 2012 Democratic National Convention in Charlotte – Hillary Clinton won't be coming.

This year, she's secretary of State. And as the country's chief diplomat, she's expected to stay above all things partisan.

Her husband, former President Bill Clinton, will be at the DNC in Charlotte, his spokesman, Matt McKenna, confirmed Friday.

But various federal statutes and the State Department's ethical guidelines will keep Secretary Clinton in Washington.

"Given her current position, she will not be attending, consistent with her not engaging in any political activity whatsoever," Philippe Reines, spokesman for the Secretary of State, told the Observer in an email Friday.

It'll be the first time in decades Clinton will miss a Democratic National Convention, Reines added – "possibly all the way back to '68 in Chicago."

And Clinton isn't the only Cabinet member expected to skip the Charlotte gathering. Federal statute also precludes the attorney general and the secretary of Defense from attending political gatherings, including national party conventions, Reines said.

"I can't think of one (of those office-holders) from the modern era who has attended," he said.

Michael Bitzer, a political scientist at Catawba College in Salisbury, also doesn't expect to see Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner in town.

"The Big Four," he calls these non-partisan appointees. "While they are political appointees, they are in a class by themselves," he said. "They are representatives of institutions that are oftentimes seen as apolitical."

And among that quartet, Secretary of State Clinton is maybe in an even higher class.

"She is certainly the president's ambassador and personal representative around the world," Bitzer said. "Getting involved in base partisan activities may leave a taint when she travels around the world."

For years, Clinton and her husband were either the stars or marquee speakers at Democratic National Conventions.

In 1992, Bill Clinton was nominated. In 1996, when she was first lady, he was re-nominated. In 2000, she was a U.S. Senate candidate in New York. And in 2008, she was Obama's foe-turned-supporter, urging her millions of backers – especially the women who saw her as an inspiring symbol – to unite behind the party's nominee.

"She did a lot to open doors for women," said Charlotte's Pat Cotham, a member of the Democratic National Committee.

Cotham said the news that Clinton won't be part of the upcoming party in Charlotte "is a disappointment, but we certainly understand. She's served our country and has done an admirable job as secretary of State."

Would Cotham like to see her continue serving the country in the White House?

"I would love that," Cotham said.

Clinton has said publicly that she thinks her political days are behind her, and she has not openly encouraged talk about another run for the presidency in 2016.

But many Democrats would be thrilled if she changed her mind. That includes Bill Clinton, judging by some of his recent talk.

Bill Clinton showing up, Bitzer said, could help Hillary Clinton stay viable for 2016 even as she stays in Washington.

"We'll get the surrogate of Bill," Bitzer said. "In fact, it may be better for Hillary to send Bill ... He could go before the delegates – those hard-core Democrats – and drop none-too-subtle hints that 'We'd like to see you again in four more years.'"