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Obama to Announce Final Cabinet Picks

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President-elect Barack Obama will announce the final selections for his Cabinet today, naming Rep. Hilda L. Solis (D-Calif.) as labor secretary and former Dallas mayor Ron Kirk as U.S. trade representative. The two will be in Chicago to be formally announced, along with Rep. Ray LaHood (R-Ill.), Obama's choice for transportation secretary.

With his selection of Solis, a liberal member of Congress, the president-elect appears to be moving toward his goal of promoting "green-collar jobs" -- those that help promote more energy efficiency, through projects such as retrofitting, something Solis has prioritized during her tenure in Congress. She is better known for her effort on energy issues than for her work on matters relating to labor; she sits on the Energy and Commerce Committee, the Natural Resources Committee, the Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming, and the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee -- but not the Education and Labor Committee.

Nonetheless, labor leaders embraced the decision to name Solis, whose father was a Teamsters shop steward in Mexico, to the post. Andy Stern, president of the Service Employees International Union, issued a statement underscoring their long-standing alliance. "From the streets of Los Angeles where she marched with the janitors who were fighting for jobs with dignity that can support a family through SEIU's Justice for Janitors campaigns, to the halls of Congress where she has been an outspoken supporter of healthcare rights for all, a livable minimum wage, and workers' right to come together for a voice on the job, Hilda Solis has never backed down from the good fight to make the American Dream available to all," Stern said.

Solis, who was born in Los Angeles in 1957, is the third Hispanic chosen for the Cabinet (in addition to Bill Richardson

and Ken Salazar), and the fifth woman (in addition to Hillary Rodham Clinton, Susan Rice, Janet Napolitano and Lisa Jackson). She is also yet another Cabinet or top staff pick for Obama who originally backed Clinton in the Democratic primaries. Solis was an avid supporter of the former first lady, but was then aggressively courted by Obama as the primaries ended as part of his effort to win over Hispanic voters.

In all likelihood, the next labor secretary will spend much time contending with the looming battle over the Employee Free Choice Act, legislation Obama supported that would make it much easier for unions to organize workers but that business groups adamantly oppose. One group issued a statement denouncing her support of the legislation. "Solis' co-sponsorship of the misnamed Employee Free Choice Act, a much-desired bill by organized labor that eliminates workers' right to a secret ballot vote in organizing elections, signals that Obama's Department of Labor will tow-the-line for union bosses," said J. Justin Wilson, a senior research analyst at the Center for Union Facts.

Among Solis's previous accomplishments: sponsoring a bill, signed into law in 2003, granting citizenship to immigrants after a year of service in the military, rather than three years, as had been the law.

Obama will install Kirk as the steward of his trade policies. The first black mayor of Dallas, Kirk ran unsuccessfully for one of Texas's U.S. Senate seats in 2002. Since leaving office, he has been a partner at the Houston-based law firm of Vinson & Elkins. Among his priorities will be following up on Obama's campaign promises on trade, including stiffer enforcement of trade agreements, particularly the environmental and labor protections in the North American Free Trade Agreement. China, which has manipulated its currency in recent years to gain trade advantages, is expected to be another item high on the trade agenda.

Staff writer Alec MacGillis contributed to this report