Next president needs a bipartisan cabinet
By Lucas McMillan, Ph.D. | Guest Columnist
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Sen. Barack Obama says he will work to create an atmosphere of post-partisanship in Washington, D.C. as president. If he is serious about such a goal, he must realize that this means inviting several Republicans to serve as members of his cabinet.

Recent presidents have invited one member of the opposite party to their cabinet. George W. Bush asked California Democratic congressman Norman Mineta to serve as transportation secretary. Bill Clinton asked Republican Sen. William Cohen of Maine to serve as defense secretary.

**IF ELECTED** president, Sen. Obama should say that -- rather than following in these footsteps -- he will appoint centrist Republicans with genuine policy ideas and experience in a bipartisan fashion to his cabinet. Contenders would include Republicans such as Maine Sen. Susan Collins for homeland security secretary, Nebraska Sen. Chuck Hagel for defense secretary, Indiana Sen. Richard Lugar for secretary of state, and Pennsylvania Sen. Arlen Specter for attorney general.

Sen. Obama recognizes that Democratic governors of "red states" such as Kansas Gov. Kathleen Sebelius and Virginia Gov. Tim Kaine are possible contenders for vice president or cabinet members. But he has not yet embraced the idea that changing the atmosphere in our nation's capital means real consideration of centrist Republicans and Democrats for key positions. Some such Democrats -- former Sens. David Boren and Sam Nunn -- have already joined the Obama team to consult on national security issues.

**GOVERNING, OF** course, is different from campaigning. And most solutions to America's biggest problems -- especially in areas as homeland security, foreign policy, immigration, and trade policy -- must incorporate the best ideas from both parties. Sen. Obama already has talked of closing the revolving door of government regulators and lobbyists and preventing executive departments from being filled with persons whose qualifications are based on their partisan affiliation. But an announcement of serious consideration of Republicans for his cabinet would allow Sen. Obama, a candidate who points toward post-partisanship but whose record on bipartisanship is sometimes lacking, to send the strongest signal that he really intends to change American politics if elected.

Sen. John McCain has a long record of working across the aisle in the Senate. Therefore, he might counter such an Obama assertion with his own list of centrist Democrats as possibilities for cabinet appointments such as Indiana Sen. Evan Bayh, Nebraska Sen. Ben Nelson, South Carolina Rep. John Spratt, or former Sens. John Breaux, Bob Graham and Gary Hart.

**SURELY THE** largest lesson from the current administration is that our national interests and American stability are harmed when the president is surrounded by persons from one area of his political party (all of whom share the same perspective) and dissenting voices are prematurely silenced. The presidency is a job with difficult decisions to be made each day. Knowledgeable experts with a willingness to engage in real debate must be invited to help our next president, Democrat or Republican, try to resolve our biggest troubles.

If Americans are lucky, both parties' presidential nominees may end up with the same names of good possibilities, many of which attended a centrist gathering in Oklahoma earlier this year. Sen. Obama -- and Sen. McCain -- should send the signal that a new administration will welcome members of the opposite party in solving issues in domestic and foreign policy.

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