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West Wing Playbook

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Can Sameera save Christmas?

By **ALEX THOMPSON** and **TINA SFONDELES** | 10/06/2021 06:38 PM EDT

Welcome to POLITICO's West Wing Playbook, *your guide to the people and power centers in the Biden administration. With Allie Bice.*

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It's bare under the Christmas tree. Stockings are empty. Hundreds of freighters are parked off both coasts waiting to unload their shipments full of late-arriving gifts. And the Grinch who stole Christmas of 2021? Republicans will inevitably say it's **JOE BIDEN**.

This is the ghost of Christmas future that the Biden White House is increasingly focused on exorcising, officials say.

The administration has become concerned that global supply line issues could become a political nightmare if Americans don't have presents to unwrap on Christmas morning or after they light the menorah. Beyond dampening festivities, weak holiday sales could have a ripple effect across the economy.

At the center of efforts to prevent that scenario is **SAMEERA FAZILI**, a deputy director of the National Economic Council (NEC) and the leader of the White House's "Supply Chain Disruptions task force." The Buffalo native with degrees from Harvard and Yale previously worked at the Federal Reserve of Atlanta, the Treasury Department, and the NEC (the White House declined to give her age but she graduated from college in 2000).

"It's clear that a lot of these issues are really, really intensifying," said one administration official familiar with the process. "The politics of the holiday season are pretty difficult. We are looking at a potential issue of a shortage of products. People are going to order stuff in December and it may just not arrive in the time frame that they've experienced in past years."

The person added that "Sameera led a lot of the economic hiring during the transition so she has an advantage in running the inter-agency process."

Fazili's task force, first formed in June, has ramped up in the past several weeks. In late August, they brought on **JOHN PORCARI** to take the lead on ports as trouble loomed on the horizon. Since he arrived, his team has met with the White House staff on a daily basis, according to the White House.

This week, port problems drew national attention, as pictures of massive cargo ships carrying as many as half a million shipping containers idled in the waters near the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, waiting to unload. Fox News, never one to miss a story about Christmas being endangered, ran a chyron on Monday warning: "Supply Chain Threatens Holiday Season."

But it's not just Fox. The Washington Post reported last week that in September, "the median cost of shipping a standard rectangular metal container from China to the West Coast of the United States hit a record \$20,586, almost twice what it cost in July, which was twice what it cost in January."

And the problem goes beyond ports. Porcari helped negotiate a pilot program in Long Beach to allow 24-hour container operations last month but the Wall Street Journal reported last week that the extended hours hadn't "attracted any truckers more than two weeks since the extended hours began."

"This is a **global supply chain issue** – and we've seen price increases in other developed economies as well – which makes it all the more difficult," a White House official wrote in an email (the bolding is theirs). "[T]he **President has been just as focused on this as**

he has on the other challenges addressed by passing and implementing the American Rescue Plan.”

Fazili is on it, but it may take a Christmas miracle.

PROGRAMMING NOTE: West Wing Playbook will not publish on Monday Oct. 11. We'll be back on our normal schedule on Tuesday Oct. 12. We hope absence makes the heart grow fonder.

Do you work in the Biden administration? Are you in touch with the White House? Are you MICHAEL R. POSADA, associate counsel?

**We want to hear from you — and we'll keep you anonymous:
westwingtips@politico.com.**

Or if you want to stay *really* anonymous send us a tip through SecureDrop, Signal, Telegram, or Whatsapp here.

PRESIDENTIAL TRIVIA

This question is courtesy of **BEN JACOBS** — which president's preferred vacation destination was the Rip Raps, an artificial island by Norfolk, Va. which is now a wildlife refuge just off I-64?

(Answer at the bottom.)

THE OVAL

SCOOP — RACHEL WALLACE, the chief of staff of the Presidential Personnel Office (PPO), is moving to become the chief of staff at the powerful Office of Management and Budget (OMB), two sources familiar with the move tell Alex and **DANIEL LIPPMAN** (follow him here!). Wallace will replace **NIKKI BUDZINSKI**, who left OMB in June, **SHIA KAPO**s scooped at the time.

Wallace has worked for current PPO head **CATHY RUSSELL**, a Biden confidante since the 1988 campaign, for many years including stints during the Obama administration, the Biden campaign, and now the Biden White House. But Russell could depart PPO in the coming months — she is under consideration to be the next executive director of UNICEF. The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

MORE GOLF STUFF: In case you didn't get enough information about Biden's golf game yesterday, some extra tidbits came in after our deadline.

ROBERT TRENT JONES JR., a renowned architect of golf courses including the restored White House putting green, played golf with Biden once in Wilmington several years ago and talked to us about his game. "The one thing that I would say is that he plays by the rules, he actually putts the ball out and counts the strokes," Jones Jr. said, a contrast to infamous golf cheaters **BILL CLINTON** and **DONALD TRUMP**.

AN UPDATE: After we sent the newsletter last night, the White House reached out with answers about two of Biden's trips to the golf course.

We updated it online but in case you didn't see it: Biden ended up eating and not playing golf during one of those outings. So he's tallied 10 golf days thus far, not 11. And Biden's mystery partner on May 14 was **RON OLIVERE**, the father of **HALLIE**, **BEAU BIDEN**'s widow and the president's daughter-in-law.

The White House had been cagey about this partner at the time. The New York Times' **DAVID SANGER** noted in his pool report that the White House was "strangely reticent to say who his golf partners were."

The upshot: Oliveri has golfed with the president more than anyone else, having joined him for 5 of his 10 outings.

WHAT? YOU WANT MORE GOLF CONTENT? We recommend **DON VAN NATTA JR.**'s 2003 book on the topic: "First Off the Tee: Presidential Hackers, Duffers, and Cheaters from Taft to Bush."

SO MUCH FOR SECRET BUYERS: The Daily Mail's **JOSH BOSWELL** scooped that **HUNTER BIDEN** held his first art exhibition Friday in Los Angeles, which was attended by potential buyers and celebrity guests including Los Angeles Mayor **ERIC GARCETTI** — Biden's nominee for ambassador to India. Hunter's wife **MELISSA BIDEN** and his daughters **NAOMI** and **MAISY BIDEN** were also in attendance.

Pictures from the event show Hunter hobnobbing with the roughly 200 guests at Milk Studios, despite the White House's repeated assurances that the gallery would keep the art buyers' identities a secret from Hunter, the president, the White House and the public.

White House press secretary **JEN PSAKI** addressed a couple of the concerns raised by the event, including whether it puts the president and the White House in an "awkward

position” with people seeking jobs or favors from the administration. “I would point to the gallerist on specifics of the restrictions that were put in place,” Psaki said. She added that the White House was “very transparent about what recommendations were made to the gallerist.” She referred questions about Garcetti to his staff.

FILLING THE RANKS

FINALLY, AN FDA PICK? The Biden administration is closing in on a nominee to lead the Food and Drug Administration, **ADAM CANCRYN**, **SARAH OWERMOHLE**, **DAVID LIM** and **LAUREN GARDNER** report.

The White House was nearing a final pick anyway, but National Institutes of Health Director **FRANCIS COLLINS**’ Tuesday announcement that he would step down accelerated the timeline, according to one person with knowledge of the matter. Among the names being floated is that of **LAURIE GLIMCHER**, the president and CEO of the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. But the White House hasn’t ruled out keeping acting Commissioner **JANET WOODCOCK**.

AGENDA SETTING

THE TRIM AND SLASH — The Biden administration is considering cutting down the prices on almost all of the items in its proposed \$3.5 trillion social spending package, in an effort to make it more appealing to lawmakers, **LAURA BARRÓN-LÓPEZ**, **NATASHA KORECKI** and **SARAH FERRIS** report.

The trio writes that even if Democrats agree on that approach, some programs will likely be cut out completely. And while lawmakers haven’t publicly voiced their opinions on this strategy, House Speaker **NANCY PELOSI** said privately that “her members prefer a less-is-more approach — funding fewer programs but for a longer amount of time.”

ADVISE AND CONSENT

NOTCH ONE FOR THE NUTMEG STATE — The Senate confirmed **SARAH MERRIAM** to be a U.S. District Court judge in Connecticut, by a 54-46 vote. Senators also voted last night to confirm **LAUREN KING** to be U.S. District Court judge in Washington, 55 to 44.

WHAT WE'RE READING

Dems take GOP's short-term debt fix offer, kicking deadline to December (POLITICO's Burgess Everett, Marianne Levine and Caitlin Emma)

White House to announce an additional \$1 billion for rapid, at-home Covid tests (NBC News' Heidi Przybyla and Shannon Pettypiece)

Biden and Chinese President Xi agree in principle to hold virtual meeting (CNN's Nicole Gaouette)

WHERE'S JOE

He had lunch with the vice president. Afterward, he hosted a meeting with business leaders and CEOs to discuss raising the debt ceiling.

WHERE'S KAMALA

After her lunch with the president, she met with the Council of Presidents of the National Pan-Hellenic Council.

THE OPPO BOOK

MICHAEL LaROSA, first lady **JILL BIDEN**'s press secretary, has been infatuated with the White House since he was six. His inspiration: a placemat with images of past presidents on it, he told a local Pennsylvania paper in 2019.

"My parents gave me that placemat and I memorized all of the presidents and started reading books on them," LaRosa said. "It became an interest in presidents morphed into a passion for politics and government."

As a kid, he confessed, "I brought books on the **[JOHN F.] KENNEDY** assassination to the playground instead of playing kickball. I watched C-SPAN instead of watching cartoons or playing video games."

Nothing—and we mean nothing—screams "good youthful fun" like hanging out at the playground reading books about presidential assassinations.

TRIVIA ANSWER

ANDREW JACKSON liked to escape to the island, according to the White House Historical Association.

AND A CALL OUT — A big thanks to Ben for sending over this question. Do you have a really hard trivia question about the presidency? Send us your best one and we may use it: westwingtips@politico.com.

We want your trivia, but we also want your feedback. What should we be covering in this newsletter that we're not? What are we getting wrong? Please let us know.

Edited by Emily Cadei

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