

White House releases six-month log of visitors

List includes labor leaders, liberal activists, lobbyists -- and Oprah

By Michael D. Shear
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During his first six months in office, according to information released Friday, President Obama met frequently at the White House with labor leaders, senators, lobbyists, business executives and liberal activists as he sought to revive the faltering economy, plan health-care reform, confirm a Supreme Court nominee and pass a huge stimulus package.

In mid-February, as Obama stumped for, and then signed, a [stimulus](#) bill, he met several times with labor boss Andy Stern. In about the same period, Obama met twice with Jamie Dimon, the head of JPMorgan Chase. On May 26, National Organization for Women President Kim Gandy was in the audience when Obama introduced court nominee [Sonia Sotomayor](#).

Some, such as Stern, Gandy and former senator Thomas A. Daschle (D-S.D.), were at the White House about a dozen times or more. Others, such as liberal financier and Democratic donor George Soros, visited once or twice in six months. And more than a few Hollywood luminaries entered the White House grounds. The White House provided this peek at the comings-and-goings of the Obama administration's guests, posting [on its Web site](#) some information from its long-sought visitors log.

In a first for any president, Obama in September authorized the release of contents of the usually hush-hush log. Friday's partial release represented the administration's first attempt to satisfy that directive.

Not comprehensive

The [list of 481 records](#), covering the first six months of the Obama presidency, is far from a comprehensive record of who met with the president and his top staff members. Aides said they released records for only those visitors about whom a specific request was made on the Whitehouse.gov Web site since last month.

The results are sometimes comical, as people whose names resembled the famous -- and infamous -- forced the West Wing to wave reporters away from the juiciest of apparent visits. Did '60s radical William Ayers, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright and filmmaker Michael Moore all visit the Obama White House, as the list indicated? Aides were quick to say: It wasn't *that* Bill Ayers, Jeremiah Wright or Michael Moore, although more details about the identities of the *real* visitors were not provided.

But, yes, officials said, the Oprah on the list really is Oprah Winfrey, and one of the Serenas listed really is tennis player Serena Williams.

"Today marks a major milestone in government transparency," said Norm Eisen, special counsel to the president for ethics and government reform, in a posting on the White House blog.

Anne L. Weismann, chief counsel of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, called the logs "invaluable" and praised the Obama administration for honoring the requests, which came after pressure from news organizations and government watchdog groups.

Most frequent visitor

Topping the list, in terms of frequency of visits, was Stern, the head of the Service Employees International Union. He made the short trip from Dupont Circle at least 19 times, including for five meetings with the president.

The records show Stern arriving at 11:34 p.m. on Feb. 18 for a meeting with Obama in the Blue Room. The next day, he was back for a meeting with White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel. Four days later, he was back in the White House for another East Room event with the president, according to the records. On June 13, Stern got a tour of the White House residence.

"We're now coming out of an eight-year period when the views of workers were falling on deaf ears," said Stern's spokeswoman, Michelle Ringuette. The frequent visits "indicate the White House is deeply concerned with hearing from people who go to work every day."

But so far, the impact of Stern's trips to 1600 Pennsylvania is uncertain. His union's membership has been cheered by the decision to include a government-run insurance plan in health reform legislation, but it has been disappointed by the lack of enthusiasm at the White House for pushing a bill that would make it easier for workers to organize. The list may be most interesting for what it does not show: visits by high-profile politicians or others who were simply never asked about by reporters or the public. But the information is a window into the mix of public events and private meetings that drive the daily White House activity.

Richard Trumka, president of the AFL-CIO, visited at least six times, including a visit with Obama in the Roosevelt Room on Feb. 6, just as Congress was debating the stimulus bill.

Soros visited the White House at least twice, including a Feb. 25 meeting with David Lipton, an Obama adviser and former undersecretary for international affairs at the Treasury Department.

Tony and Heather Podesta, the powerful husband-and-wife lobbying duo, have met with top White House officials numerous times. Tony Podesta made at least four trips; Heather Podesta visited three times.

Actors Denzel Washington and George Clooney visited. So did the Rev. Al Sharpton. Former vice president Al Gore was at the White House complex four times.

John Podesta, who co-chaired Obama's transition and is president of the Center for American Progress, a liberal think tank, has visited the White House at least 12 times

between February and July. He met with Obama in the Oval Office the morning of Feb. 2, about two weeks after the inauguration, and attended other meetings with his top aides. Ellen R. Malcolm, a prominent liberal activist and president of the women's advocacy group Emily's List, visited Obama at an East Room event on March 11.

Daschle went to the White House on Jan. 25, five days before it became public that he had not paid \$128,000 in taxes over three years.

Staff writers Philip Rucker, Ceci Connolly, Anne E. Kornblut, Michael A. Fletcher and Alec MacGillis contributed to this report.