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Trump packs his transition team with ultra-rightists and family members

By Fred Mazelis

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US President-elect Donald Trump reorganized his transition team on Friday, naming Vice President-elect Mike Pence to replace New Jersey Governor Chris Christie as chairman, and installing ultra-right figures as vice chairs, alongside four members of his own family.

The presence of Trump's three adult children, Ivanka, Eric and Donald, Jr., and his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, as members of the panel planning his new government is extraordinary and unprecedented, and gives a quasi-dynastic character to the Trump presidency. Throughout the campaign, Trump claimed that he would separate his billion-dollar hotel and resort empire from a Trump administration by turning over the business to his children. Instead, he has named his children to set up his administration.

The installation of Pence seems to be an admission that Christie is hopelessly damaged goods, after several of his former top aides were convicted in the George Washington Bridge traffic tie-up scandal, in which they said he was intimately involved. It is also an olive branch to the Christian fundamentalist right and to congressional Republicans, since Pence is an evangelical antiabortion zealot and a former House Republican leader.

Christie is demoted to vice chair of the transition, along with former New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions, and

Michael Flynn, the retired lieutenant general who has been Trump's main spokesman on military matters.

The panel will be involved in picking top White House staff and the heads of 15 Cabinet departments, as well as moving ahead with nominations for 1,000 other jobs that require Senate confirmation, and 3,000 additional presidential appointees.

The transition team also announced twelve other members on Friday, including Republican National Chairman Reince Priebus; California high-tech billionaire Peter Thiel, who was almost alone to support Trump among Silicon Valley moguls; and Stephen Bannon, Trump's campaign chairman and the head of the Breitbart News website, home to many in the neo-fascist "alt-right."

Wall Street continued its upward climb following Trump's Election Day victory, with a more modest rise on Friday. Among the significant transition appointments is that of Paul Atkins, a former Republican member of the Securities and Exchange Commission under the George W. Bush administration, to recommend policies on financial regulation.

The appointment of Atkins coincides with reports that Jeb Hensarling, a prominent right-wing Texas Republican congressman, is being considered for the post of Treasury Secretary, according to the *Wall Street Journal*. Hensarling, the chair of the House Financial Services Committee for the past six years, is a leading advocate of repealing or rolling back the Dodd-Frank law passed in 2010.

The extremely weak regulatory measures in Dodd-Frank are still too much for the Republicans. Trump and his critics in the Republican establishment are in general agreement on giving big business and the banks a free hand in stepping up the exploitation of the working class and laying the basis for even more frenzied financial speculation. Among measures favored by Hensarling are looser regulations for insurers, as well as removing government restraints on consumer-finance products such as mortgages and payday loans, which have had such devastating consequences for millions of workers desperate for credit.

Other transition team and possible Cabinet appointments seem calculated with an eye to the destruction of federally financed social services, with reactionary opponents of programs like education, health care and environmental protection tipped for selection to administer the agencies responsible for them.

Ultra-right former presidential candidate Ben Carson, the neurosurgeon who was one of the first to drop out of the race and endorse Trump for the Republican nomination earlier this year, is reportedly being considered to head the Department of Health and Human Services or to become the next surgeon general. Carson is a religious fundamentalist and a fierce opponent of abortion rights and public health measures more generally.

Another new member of Trump's transition team is Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach. Kobach is a notorious advocate of voter ID laws and other measures to restrict voting rights, as

well as anti-immigrant measures. He will be “advis[ing] Trump on policy issues and prepare him for his first 100 days in office,” according to the *Journal*.

Kobach was the prime mover of language in the Republican Party platform calling for the erection of a border wall between the US and Mexico. This became one of the signature lines in the Trump campaign, as he sought to divert anger and frustration over the economic crisis into the reactionary channels of anti-immigrant demagoguery.

Another important appointment is that of Trump’s transition adviser for the Environmental Protection Agency. This individual, who could well end up running the EPA himself, is Myron Ebell, director of the Center of Energy and Environment at the Competitive Enterprise Institute. As reactionary as the official spokesmen on the environment, both Republican and Democrat, have been in recent years, Ebell marks a significant departure. As media reports have explained, Ebell is an opponent of “alarmism” over climate change. The *New York Times* reports that he “has asserted that whatever warming caused by greenhouse gas pollution is modest and could be beneficial.”