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### Obama unveils 'Organizing for Action'

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President Barack Obama on Friday announced the relaunch of his remaining campaign apparatus as a new tax-exempt group called Organizing for Action that will “play an active role” in “mobilizing around and speaking out in support of important legislation” during his second term.

“We may have started this as a longshot presidential primary campaign in 2007, but it’s always been about more than just winning an election. Together, we’ve made our communities stronger, we’ve fought for historic legislation, and we’ve brought more people than ever before into the political process,” Obama wrote in an email to supporters. “Organizing for Action will be a permanent commitment to this mission.”

[\(PHOTOS: Obama 2012 campaign staff\)](#)

“We’ve got to keep working on growing the economy from the middle out, along with making meaningful progress on the issues we care about — immigration reform, climate change, balanced deficit reduction, reducing gun violence, and the implementation of the Affordable Care Act,” Obama wrote. “I’m not going to be able to take them on without you.”

Organizing for Action will be separate from the Democratic National Committee, with Obama’s 2012 campaign manager Jim Messina serving as the national chairman of the group.

[\(PHOTOS: 39 great photos from Obama’s first term\)](#)

The group’s board will include a host of former Obama staffers, an Obama campaign aide said Friday. Along with Messina will be Obama campaign and White House alumni Stephanie Cutter, Robert Gibbs, Jennifer O’Malley-Dillon, Julianna Smoot and Erik Smith. Senior adviser David Plouffe will also join when he leaves the White House later this month.

Obama’s email includes a link to a [video of Michelle Obama](#) stressing the importance of Obama campaign volunteers continuing to work to support the president’s agenda.

“If we want to finish what we started and truly make that change we can believe in, we can’t stop now,” she says in the video. “Supporters like you will be the heart of this organization.”

[\(PHOTOS: 2012 mega-donors\)](#)

Messina says that he will be intimately involved in directing the new organization to back Obama during the second term.

“It will be a supporter-driven organization, as we’ve always been, staying true to our core principles: ‘respect, empower, include,’” Messina wrote to supporters in an email shortly after midnight Friday. “We’ll work on the key battles of our generation, train the next generation of grassroots organizers and leaders, and organize around local issues in our own communities. We’ll continue to support the president in creating jobs and growing the economy from the middle out, and in fighting for issues like immigration reform, climate change, balanced deficit reduction, and reducing gun violence.”

The effort will begin on Sunday, the day the president is formally sworn in to his second term, as Obama campaign staff and volunteers gather at the Washington Hilton for an event dubbed the Obama Legacy Conference.

“We have a remarkable opportunity right now to change our country, and if we can take the enthusiasm and passion that people showed throughout the campaign and channel it into the work ahead of us, we will be unstoppable,” he wrote. “As the chair of Organizing for Action, I will be deeply involved in this new organization, but it will be organizers like you who will determine where it goes. I have no doubt we can take this grassroots movement to new and extraordinary heights.”

The formation of the group will make Messina the de facto political director for Obama, and is an implicit rejection of DNC Chairman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, an Obama outsider not close to the president, as the party’s operational leader.

Messina, a frequent visitor to the West Wing since the election, was Obama’s chief in-house political aide during the legislative battles of 2009 and 2010 and is expected to expand that role on the outside, Democrats close to the situation tell POLITICO. Messina is especially adept at assembling coalitions and keeping them from splintering during tough political fights, a necessity if Obama hopes to marshal public support for his agenda on guns, immigration and the budget.

The Obama campaign finished with an unmatched list of millions of email addresses of supporters and volunteers tagged by geography and degree of devotion that was perhaps Obama’s biggest advantage in mobilizing support for his second-term agenda. The campaign developed extensive technology for use in its organizing and finished with \$5.3 million still in the campaign coffers.

Since he won reelection, Obama’s campaign has emailed supporters to drum up support for the president’s positions during the fiscal cliff stand-off and, on Thursday, on Obama’s proposed gun violence reforms. The vast majority of its employees have left, though Messina and spokeswoman Katie Hogan remain.

As a 501(c)4 group, the new Obama organization will be separate and different from Priorities USA, the Obama-backing super PAC that could accept unlimited financial contributions in support of his reelection campaign. Despite high-profile backing from top Obama aides and allies including former President Bill Clinton, Priorities foundered compared with groups

backing GOP rival Mitt Romney.

Priorities officials did not respond to request for comments about the group's future.

But unlike a super PAC, the new nonprofit will be able to accept anonymous contributions. The nonprofit could voluntarily choose to release the names of donors — but such disclosure is not mandated by the Internal Revenue Service or the Federal Election Commission. There are no contribution caps on what donors are allowed to give to 501(c)4 groups.

While Obama has not spoken publicly about the future fate of his campaign apparatus, Vice President Joe Biden twice this week hinted at it playing a role in the administration's second term.

During a Monday meeting to discuss gun violence with Democratic members of Congress, Biden told the small group that he and Obama have the campaign's organizations at its disposal as it seeks to influence public opinion on guns.

Then again Thursday at the U.S. Conference of Mayors, Biden again made reference to building a campaign out to support Obama's agenda.

"We're going to take this fight to the halls of Congress, Biden said of the gun control fight. "We're going to take it beyond that. We're going to take it to the American people. We're going to go around the country making our case, and we're going to let the voices, the voices of the American people be heard."

And former Obama spokesman Robert Gibbs, who has remained a trusted sounding board after leaving the White House, said Wednesday during an MSNBC interview that the Obama campaign organization would be heard from again.

"The president has the most exciting campaign apparatus ever built. It's time to turn that loose," Gibbs said. "It's time to turn that loose for something more than just an election. If the NRA's got a list, then Obama for America has a bigger list."

The Obama campaign seems to have already heeded Gibbs's advice — a Thursday email under Messina's name asked supporters to stand with the White House on gun control.

The big tax advantages of organizing as a nonprofit involve shielding big donors from public scrutiny — something that Obama himself has been highly critical of. A number of both liberal and conservative nonprofit groups have claimed nonprofit status while participating in election campaigns to shield the identities of major donors.

"One of the reasons that one of the groups that Crossroads GPS organized as a 501(c)4 is to shield of the identities of donors," said Rick Hasen, an election law expert at the University of California, Irvine.

“The one question is whether the new group will disclose their donors,” Hasen said. “There will be a considerable amount of irony if the group did not — even if the group is not going to function like Crossroads GPS.”

Liberal watchdogs and good government groups have long railed against the abuse of tax-exempt status to hide donors — but plenty of nonprofits operate within the rules, experts say.

“There are many organizations that are involved in political organizations that don’t run afoul of election rules,” Hasen said.

Opponents of campaign finance reform say it’s another reversal by Obama — who has said repeatedly that he is against the amount of money sloshing around in politics.

“It’s just further evidence that everybody recognizes that there are valid reasons for people to want to remain anonymous,” said Bradley Smith, a former Federal Election Commission chairman and head of the Center for Competitive Politics.

Smith — a vocal opponent of increased regulation of money in politics — called some of Obama’s rhetoric on campaign finance “B.S.”

“They have been highly critical of this,” Smith said, referring to Obama’s stance on outside groups like Crossroads GPS and others who are essentially “dark money” groups.

Liberal activist groups and watchdog organizations have repeatedly asked the IRS to investigate whether groups like Crossroads (and the nonprofit arm of the Obama super PAC Priorities USA, which operates in a similar manner) violated their tax-exempt status by participating in election activities like running ads and campaigning for or against candidates.

News of the new Obama group was first reported Thursday by the Los Angeles Times.