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# COUNTDOWN TO CRAWFORD

## THE LAST DAYS OF THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION

Elaine Chao, only Asian American in Bush Cabinet, to head final 2008 US Olympic delegation



Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was supposed to head up the U.S. delegation to attend the closing ceremony of the 2008 Olympics on Sunday.

But, given her schedule to tackle the diplomatic repercussions of Russia's attack on Georgia, Rice can't make it.

So the White House announced today that Labor Secretary Elaine Chao, who was already named to the delegation, will serve as its leader.

Which makes us wonder -- why wasn't she chosen to head the delegation in the first place?

No disrespect meant to Rice. The secretary of State is a fascinating person in her own right, growing up in segregationist Birmingham, Ala., and becoming not only provost of Stanford University but also a concert pianist to boot. All that before she entered government service, where she served first as national security advisor and now as secretary of State.

Still, it could be argued that Chao is the most interesting member of Bush's Cabinet, having arrived in America from Asia at the age of 8 speaking no English. She went on to receive an undergraduate degree in economics from Mount Holyoke College and an MBA from Harvard. Then she did chapters in government, business and think tanks.

Chao, married to the Senate's Republican leader, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, is also the only member of the Cabinet who has served all eight years of the Bush presidency. And that deserves an award of some kind.

Also making the cut for the U.S. delegation to the Closing Gig: figure skating champion Michelle Kwan, U.S. Olympic Committee Chairman Peter Ueberroth, Bush confidante and former assistant secretary of State Karen Hughes, U.S. Ambassador to China Clark Randt Jr. and Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt.

-- Johanna Neuman

*Photo: Don Kelsen / Los Angeles Times*