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Rawlings-Blake to take leadership post at DNC

By John Fritze, The Baltimore Sun

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WASHINGTON — Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake will become the secretary of the Democratic National Committee on Tuesday, giving her a prominent role in national politics.

The appointment, which has not been formally announced, will give Rawlings-Blake a voice in the party's national political apparatus at a time when President Barack Obama is beginning his second term and several Democrats — including Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley — are thought to be jockeying for the 2016 nomination.

"My hope is that we can carry forward the momentum of the Obama administration and that we can continue to grow the Democratic Party," Rawlings-Blake said Monday in Washington, where she was attending Obama's second inauguration. "It's about making sure that we activate the majority of the people in the country."

The move comes as former Obama campaign aides are launching a permanent advocacy group called Organizing for Action that hopes to marshal the volunteer muscle that twice elected him to the White House. Some Democrats have questioned whether the group, which will accept donations, could cut into the party's influence.

A DNC spokesman did not respond to a request for comment.

The most public role the party secretary performs is to call the roll of delegates at the national convention — a largely symbolic act of recognizing each state on the floor to determine which candidate its delegates will support. Behind the scenes, the secretary is responsible for scheduling meetings, distributing talking points to members and, occasionally, campaigning for candidates across the country.

Rawlings-Blake, 42, has served as Baltimore's mayor since 2010 and has presided over the city at a time of historic lows in homicides and fire deaths. A former president of the City Council, she also has led the city through trying budget times.

The daughter of the late Del. Howard P. Rawlings, she helped change the direction of city and state politics when in 1999 she convinced her influential father to back O'Malley, a white councilman from Northeast Baltimore, in his bid for mayor of a majority-black city. O'Malley and Rawlings-Blake have remained close allies.

The current DNC secretary, Alice Germond, has served for three consecutive terms — predating Obama's first term. Active in the party for more than four decades, Germond is married to longtime political writer and former Baltimore Sun columnist Jack Germond.

"I wish her very well," Alice Germond said of Rawlings-Blake. "I've enjoyed being the secretary for a long time. It's a tremendous honor."

The decision, which must be confirmed by what is expected to be a perfunctory vote by party leaders, appears to have been made quickly. Rawlings-Blake said she first learned of the appointment Sunday when she was in Washington attending a reception for Vice President Joe Biden's official inauguration.

Baltimore Sun reporter Luke Broadwater contributed to this article.

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