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Administration officials were firm that President Obama was only beginning to think about a new attorney general, but many in Washington are already focusing on **Kathryn Ruemmler**, the former White House counsel, who recently returned to private practice.

Ms. Ruemmler, 43, is known to be highly trusted by the president, and she helped guide his thinking on gay rights, the health care law and the reach of executive authority.

She is one of only three women to serve as White House counsel.

Ms. Ruemmler, who grew up in Washington State and studied law at Georgetown, also has a history of winning over skeptical Republicans. "You never had to question where she was coming from, and she never volunteered something she didn't know," said Senator Saxby Chambliss, Republican of Georgia. "She is very precise but very firm also, and held her own well."

She also won admirers as a lead prosecutor on the Enron task force. But if Ms. Ruemmler is nominated, the advice she dispensed to the White House about the I.R.S. scandal and the attacks on Benghazi, Libya, will certainly draw scrutiny.

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