

THE CHIEF OF STAFF WHO MIGHT HAVE BEEN

There are a number of details from Ron Suskind's new book revealed by an AP and a NYT preview of it, the most alarming (but not surprising) that TurboTax Timmeh Geithner managed to save Citibank by basically ignoring Obama's order to break it up.

The book, by Ron Suskind, a former Wall Street Journal reporter, quotes White House documents that say Mr. Obama's decisions were routinely "re-litigated" by the chairman of the National Economic Council, Lawrence H. Summers. Some decisions, including one to overhaul the debt-ridden Citibank, were carried out sluggishly or not at all by a resistant Treasury secretary, Timothy F. Geithner, according to the book.

[snip]

In the book, Mr. Geithner denies that he obstructed any presidential directive. A senior Treasury official said a government restructuring of Citibank would have occurred only if the Treasury had been left with a significant ownership stake in the bank after it emerged from a financial stress test.

A pity Obama didn't fire Timmeh long before it came time to panic over the fact the Administration had gone so easy on the banks. A pity, too, Obama just begged his insubordinate Treasury Secretary to stick around.

But I'm just as interested in Suskind's revelation that Obama didn't want Rahm at first.

The book says one of Obama's top advisers, former chief of staff Rahm Emanuel, was not the president's first choice for the position. According to Suskind, Emanuel's name was not even on the initial short list, which included White House aide Pete Rouse.

Folks on the Hill are now bitching about Bill Daley. Though I think they're crazy to miss Rahm, who may have been nicer to the Hill but was also ineffective. Me, I thought Rouse was the best of the three and wonder what it was that led Obama to pass up that choice and—in what was one of his first announcements—pick Rahm instead. It's not like Rouse wasn't available; he has been with the Administration throughout the Administration.

There was still a lot wrong with the execution of this Administration, such as the insubordinate Treasury Secretary that Obama didn't fire. But a decent Chief of Staff might have at least made it more effective.