

OBAMA AND THE GUYS

✘ In a really smart move, Obama is quickly pulling together a meeting between him and the nation's governors (and always the master of theater, he's holding it at Independence Hall in Philly).

President-elect Barack Obama is meeting with nearly all the U.S. governors in Philadelphia next Tuesday to discuss how the economic crisis is crimping states and their budgets.

Nick Shapiro, a spokesman for the Obama transition, said the meeting will provide an opportunity for Obama and Vice President-elect Joe Biden to talk with state chief executives about "the unique challenges facing our states." The discussions are being hosted by National Governors Association Chairman Ed Rendell and Vice Chairman Jim Douglas.

Douglas said 40 governors and governors-elect plan to attend the group discussion, which was put together just in the last few days, at the city's famed Independence Hall.

"It's short notice, some grumbled, but virtually everyone has cleared his or her calendar," said Douglas, the Republican governor of Vermont.

Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, running mate to Obama's Republican opponent in the presidential race, Sen. John McCain, also planned to attend the gathering, her office said.

Originally when I heard Palin was going to be meeting with Obama, I thought it just an elaborate excuse for Sasha and Piper to get together discuss their recently more sophisticated fashion tastes. But this move is

much, much smarter than a sleep-over between Sasha and Piper.

Consider that most observers believe that Republican Governors (including, but not limited to, Palin, Jindal, Pawlenty, Crist, and Utah's Huntsman) will set the new direction for the beleaguered Republican Party. These governors are increasingly the leaders of the Republican party, not John Boehner or Mitch McConnell.

And Obama has seen to it that—as one of their last orders of business before the holidays, and therefore one of their last orders of business before the new Congress—they will meet with the President-Elect to tell him about how important infrastructure investments and loans to cash-strapped states will be to the nation's economic recovery. What Governor, after all, Republican or Democrat, doesn't love getting federal funds to spend in their state?

Obama is soliciting support among the Republican party's rising leaders for the massive stimulus package that will arrive on Congress' lap at the beginning of January. He's doing so just in time for these Governors to give their Congressmen and Senators an earful over the holiday cocktail party season.

It was already clear that Obama was doing everything he could to make sure he had people in place to twist arms in the House and Senate. It now looks like he's making sure arms get twisted back home, as well.