



Yeas & Nays

## 'Hip and cool': The new power spots

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### Catch a rising star

It used to be that in order to spot those who have their hands on the levers of power, one had to hang around at a stodgy downtown hotel like the Hay Adams or a five-star dining room like Citronelle.

No more. Another way in which the Obama administration has changed Washington lies in the after-hours social habits of its top aides — and the congressional leaders and lobbyists who love them.

From the inauguration to President Barack Obama's stop at Ben's Chili Bowl and beyond, U Street has been ground zero for Obama's fans as well as his aides. But the buzz now also runs north and south along 14th Street, thanks to a bevy of hot new casual restaurants.

"The neighborhood, specifically, has become the coolest place to hang out in D.C.," said **Ian Hilton**, a manager at Marvin on 14th Street. "The inauguration helped, and this area became Obama-central."

The fact Marvin has a large Obama mural on the side of its building, he adds, "probably helps." But in any case, Hilton said, he's definitely seeing "more people from Chicago than there used to be."

Chicago ties help in luring Obama-ites, but so do Democratic Party connections. Just ask **Khalid Pitts**, co-owner of Cork, the wine bar a few blocks south. He still works full time as director of political accountability for the Service Employees International Union, and his wife, **Diane Gross**, is a former chief counsel to Sen. **Barbara Mikulski**, D-Md.

"This is a small town," said Pitts. And the new establishment isn't doing "power lunches. They're doing places that are hip and cool."

With respect to the neighborhood, Pitts says, "It's been gentrified but still has an edge to it."

Other 14th Street bars and restaurants that attract the Democratic elite are The Gibson, the new speakeasy by the owners of Marvin, and Posto, the new Italian eatery by the owners of Tosca downtown.

But not all the new hot spots are clustered around U Street and Logan Circle. Take Art & Soul, the new bar and restaurant in the Liaison Hotel at the base of Capitol Hill. Given its location, the hotel has attracted the usual spate of political fundraisers, but its celebrity chef, **Art Smith** (the former personal chef to **Oprah Winfrey** and ex-Sen. **Bob Graham**) brings them in for dinner as well. Recently spotted there: White House Chief of Staff **Rahm Emanuel**, former NBC anchor **Tom Brokaw** and White House Social Secretary **Desiree Rogers**. "Thank God for **Nancy Pelosi**," Smith recently told Yeas & Nays, regarding to how much the House speaker comes in.

Of course, enterprising paparazzi could do worse than to hang out at Ben's Chili Bowl, hoping for the odd presidential sighting. Said one Democratic lobbyist: "Ben's Chili Bowl is still big — at least with tourists who watch 'The Today Show.'"