

Michelle Emerging As Active First Lady

Defining Her Role Already, Observes Bill Plante, And It's Clear She Intends To Help Shape Debate Over Issues She Cares About (CBS)

It's Day 17 of the brand new Obama administration.

And, reports **CBS News correspondent Senior White House Correspondent Bill Plante**, we've already seen plenty of evidence that first lady Michele Obama doesn't plan to stay quietly at home at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

On Wednesday, she made her second visit in as many weeks to a government agency, the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Staffers gave her a standing ovation when she was introduced, and she remarked to them that, "I want to learn, listen, know what's going on from you."

And, says Plante, it wasn't just a courtesy call: There was also a pitch for her husband's economic stimulus plan.

"It's of critical importance that we stem the tide of foreclosures," Mrs. Obama said.

She has, Plante observes, embraced Washington -- and Washington loves her.

She's made it plain that education is a priority, visiting second graders at a Washington public charter school along with President Obama, as well as the Education Department last week.

She's also made it clear that her children come first.

"She is the ultimate mom," friend Sandy Matthews told Plante. "That's what she lives and breathes to do and be. That is her first priority

But there's more she'd like to do.

She told the **CBS News** broadcast **60 Minutes**, "I care about military families and the work-family balance issue and I care about education."

The beauty of that, as Laura Bush's former chief of staff notes is that, unlike their husbands, first ladies can pick and choose.

It is," says Anita McBride, "one of the most unique positions, if you will, in our nation, because it does give you an automatic powerful platform to use to speak about issues you care about."

Michelle Obama had a long visit with Laura Bush not long ago and, says Plante, came away with this advice: Take advantage of this platform you get as first lady.