I just got off the phone with a Bloomberg News reporter asking me about Harvard Law Professor Jody Freeman's appointment as counselor to Carol Browner. After singing Jody's' praises (of which there are a great many) he asked me a more general question that has me thinking. Is it a good thing for Obama to appoint law professors as high level advisors? The question — at least in my mind — is meant to be about the generic category of law professor, not about any individual. I of course answered yes but I was speaking on the fly and probably didn't give the most coherent answer in the moment. So here's an initial stab at why I think I'm right.

Law professors have the luxury of time (I say that despite feeling constantly pressed for it). That means we can think about issues with some luxury and read and absorb information across a broad spectrum of disciplines. I contrast this luxury with my days in practice when I lurched from one pressing matter to the next. Our ability to read and think broadly may give us a birds-eye perspective that those in the trenches lack.

Teaching on a particular topic provides a similar advantage. We may try to make sense of the doctrinal whole, to paint a picture of a statutory scheme that highlights its coherences and incoherences, to compare and contrast regulatory approaches, to understand how scholarly theories can help us make sense of regulatory options and so forth.

So law professors bring to bear a perspective on policy and legal questions that long time Washington insiders or politicians or practicing lawyers don't have. I think that perspective has got to be a valuable.

Of course I wouldn't want to see an administration populated soley by law professors (and I can think of a number of law professors I'd never like to see in powerful positions :)). We have no idea how Congress actually operates (even those of us who study it); there's no reason to believe we'd be particularly politically saavy; and most of us lack the nitty gritty detailed understanding of how any particular policy world actually operates. But my sense is that with professors like Lisa Heinzerling and Jody Freeman advising saavy experienced pros like Lisa Jackson and Carol Browner we'll get a blend of worlds that will be quite effective.