

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Obama Keeps Schedule Clear To Focus On Ebola

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CHICAGO (AP) -- Rarely one to leave anything to chance, President Barack Obama is playing it by ear this week as his administration's response to the Ebola scare continues to evolve.

After waking up in his own bed Monday at his family's home in Chicago, Obama plans to vote early for the midterms and attend a fundraiser for Democrats. How he'll spend the rest of the week is anyone's guess.

That's because Obama's schedule this week is a work in progress, in a departure from the normal practice in which the president's schedule is previewed days in advance. The blank slate reflects the White House's attempt to stay nimble, leaving Obama room to

maneuver amid a public health crisis that has been anything but predictable.

Last week, Obama twice had to cancel planned campaign trips at the last minute to stay in Washington to focus on Ebola. This week, Obama is hoping to avoid such last-minute cancelations and show he's singularly focused on the task at hand.

So even though it's crunch time for the midterm elections, with Democrats counting on their president to help get out the vote, Obama hasn't made any promises to campaign this week with candidates. Even the U.S.-led military operation against the Islamic State group may take a lower profile as Obama seeks to reassure an anxious public that stopping Ebola in its tracks is Priority No. 1.

White House aides have acknowledged the federal government's initial response to Ebola reaching American soil was lacking, and hope a more robust response now will make up for early errors. In a sign of how all-encompassing the Ebola situation has become, Obama convened a rare Saturday evening meeting of roughly 20 top aides and Cabinet officials to discuss Ebola.

Obama's new "Ebola czar," Ron Klain, is expected to start work this week after being tapped by Obama on Friday to coordinate the government-wide response.

On Sunday, the Pentagon announced it would form a 30-person support team to assist civilian medical professionals in the U.S. if needed, while the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention prepared to revise safety protocols for Ebola that failed to prevent two hospital workers in Dallas from contracting the virus from a patient who later died.

The seat-of-his-pants approach is a change of pace for Obama, who is typically reluctant to get sidetracked by events of the moment. His aides tend to hunker down when faced with setbacks outside their control. But in recent months, Obama has come under criticism for maintaining his schedule - golf, vacation and all - even when events in Iraq, Ukraine or the U.S.-Mexico border demanded his attention.

During rallies Sunday for Democrats in Illinois and Maryland - Obama's first of the 2014 midterm season - Obama announced he would be among those casting their ballots when early voting in Illinois starts Monday. Obama plans to return to the White House on Monday night.