

Oprah auditions for the White House

The most famous woman in the world may have just launched her bid for its biggest job, writes **Will Pavia**

Oprah Winfrey arrived on the stage at the Golden Globes to receive a lifetime achievement award, but left it as a potential candidate for the White House.

The television mogul is considering a run for the presidency in 2020, according to friends who spoke after an ecstatic reception to her speech promising Americans that "a new day is on the horizon".

A chorus of celebrities declared that her candidacy was now all but inevitable and her partner, Stedman Graham, assured a reporter that she was prepared to seek the highest office in the land. "It's up to the people," he told the *Los Angeles Times*. "She would absolutely do it."

CNN quoted two friends, who did not wish to be named, who said she was "actively thinking" of a presidential run.

A Winfrey campaign for the Democratic nomination could set up an extraordinary contest in 2020, in which two former television hosts battle to be the leader of the free world.

Political pundits and operatives noted her high favourability ratings. "Don't know if he meant to fire it, or whether Oprah knew he would, but Stedman kind of launched a bombshell here," said David Axelrod, Barack Obama's former chief strategist.

Brad Anderson, the Iowa state director for Mr Obama's 2012 re-election campaign, said: "Call me, Oprah. I've got some Iowa county chairs who would love to hear from you."

Winfrey has long been touted as a potential political contender, with the wealth, clout and universal recognition to mount a formidable campaign. Reluctant, for much of her career, to enter the political sphere, her endorsement of Barack Obama a year before the 2008 election gave an important boost to his candidacy. She also backed Hillary Clinton in 2016.

After the election of Donald Trump, she was asked whether she was now considering her own qualifications for the job. "It's clear you don't need government experience to be elected president," said David Rubenstein, the financier, in an interview on Bloomberg TV. "That's what I thought," Winfrey replied. "And now I'm thinking, 'Oh.'"

Later, Gayle King, the television host, insisted that her friend was joking, while Winfrey said last summer: "I will never run for public office. That's a

pretty definitive thing." But another joke, on the night of the Golden Globes, restarted talk of President Oprah. Seth Meyers, the host, noted that his mockery of Donald Trump during the White House correspondent's dinner in 2011 was said to have made Mr Trump determined to run for the White House.

"If that's true, I just want to say: Oprah, you will never be president," he said. "You do not have what it takes."

When Winfrey accepted the Cecil B. DeMille award for lifetime achievement, she recalled an evening in 1964

when "I was a little girl sitting on the linoleum floor of my mother's house in Milwaukee," watching Sidney Poitier win an Oscar for best actor. "Up onto the stage came

the most elegant black man I had ever seen," she said. "I have tried many, many times to explain what a moment like that means to a little girl, watching as my mum came through the door bone-tired from cleaning other people's houses."

The Globes was the first big Hollywood ceremony since the sexual harassment scandal began last autumn. Nearly every female winner felt obliged to address the controversy, yet none of their speeches had the impact of Winfrey's.

"She launched a rocket tonight. I want her to run for president," Meryl Streep told the *Washington Post*. "Now she doesn't have a choice."

● Jez Butterworth, 48, author of the play *Jerusalem*, has revealed that he punched Harvey Weinstein, who had punched a producer he wanted to sack. The incident was 17 years ago when Butterworth was directing Nicole Kidman in *Birthday Girl*.

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