Talk to Orange County politicians and people immersed in foreign affairs and there's a mixture of skepticism, pride and hope in the surprise award of the Nobel Peace Prize to President Barack Obama.

Wylie Aitken, chairman of the Democratic Foundation of Orange County, is among the doubters.

Obama, he said, has "set a remarkable tone and laid out where he's going. But rarely do we get rewarded for our road map – we get rewarded at the end of the journey." Aitken said giving him the Peace Prize is a "dangerous precedent for the future, to give prizes as encouragement."

That's exactly what pleased Yasith Weerasuriya, head of the Orange County chapter of the World Affairs Council.

"I believe the intention of the Nobel committee was to provide an impetus to initiatives that are largely in motion in hope it will help them come to fruition," said Weerasuriya, who is president of Stanbridge College in Irvine.

Ali Shakeri, a businessman who spent 140 days in an Iranian prison and now sits on the board of UCI's Center for Citizen Peace Building, pointed to the outreach the president has made in his first months in office.

"He took a trip to Europe, took a trip to the Middle East, he talked to the people of the Middle East, the people of Europe. What we do in civilized nations is encourage him to continue this path. We're not going to wait."

John Eastman, dean of the Chapman School of Law, doesn't view the prize as encouragement.

"There no longer the incentive for you to win the prize after you've accomplished something," he

said, calling the committee's choice "bizarre and unfortunate."

Rep. Dana Rohrabacher pulled no punches in his reaction to the Oslo panel's decision.

"Giving the Nobel Prize to a politician who has yet to accomplish anything can do nothing but diminish the value of the Nobel Peace Prize," said Rohrabacher, R-Huntington Beach. Rohrabacher believes this move "reflects a leftist politicization of the Nobel Peace Prize process. This is very sad."

Other Republican politicians expressed similar sentiments.

Rep. John Campbell, R-Irvine, said Obama's foreign policy is **"non-existent"** and that the president seems to
"spend his time trying to socialize medicine and bring the Olympics to Chicago," referring to Obama's failed trip to Copenhagen.

"I think we underestimate his impact overseas," asserts Raphael Sonenshein, a Cal State Fullerton political science professor. "Americans don't really have an idea of how big an impact around the world Obama is having. I spent five months in Paris during the election and when he got elected, all these ideas of the possibilities of America came flying off people's lips."

But Don Will, associate dean and professor of Peace Studies at Chapman said despite the accolade, Obama's challenges in such hot spots as Pakistan Afghanistan will not get any easier.

Will said he told his students in his Model UN class that "the only way to understand this is to put yourself in the shoes of Europeans." The prize decision, he said, "is a reflection of the frustration of the unilateralism of the Bush years."

Matt Sant, a Newport Beach attorney and former chairman of the local World Affairs Council

believes the committee's decision goes beyond Obama

"I think even though he's the recipient in name that in some ways the award is being given to the American people," said Sant, a Newport Beach attorney. "I think the fact that for the first time in history, we've elected an African American president says a lot about who we are as a country and how far we've come from our past."

Having said that, Sant believes Obama gets enough international acclaim. He would have preferred to see the award given to someone who does good works but has gone largely unrecognized.

The central Asian Institute, Sant says, which brings education and poverty relief to some of the most remote regions in Pakistan and Afghanistan, was nominated and there was some belief its founder Greg Mortenson might be recognized.

"Now billions of people will never hear about the work they're doing," Sant said.