

Oregon Firsts: Female U.S. Attorney, Attorney General

By Nigel Duara
The Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Barring a dramatic upset in the attorney general's race in November, two women will occupy the top two places in Oregon law enforcement by early next year, an unprecedented feat for women in a state with a good track record for putting women in leadership positions.

Ellen Rosenblum handily won the Democratic primary for state attorney general in May, and her competition in the November general election will be a write-in Republican candidate.

Her federal counterpart, U.S. Attorney Amanda Marshall, has held her seat since October. But does it matter that two women are in this position?

"Of course it matters," said Marshall, 43. "It would be ungrateful of me to say it doesn't matter. I think for girls growing up right now in Oregon, they look at Ellen and I and they think gee, what do I want to be when I grow up? I want to be the U.S. attorney, and I don't think it's just girls (that think that)."

Marshall, the daughter of a mother who moved often in her childhood, said frequent changes helped shape her as a person and an attorney.

"It's not just the fact I'm a woman," she said. "It's also, I didn't come from a position of privilege."

She's had a job since her first paper route at age 11, later working as a waitress in a retirement home to earn money in high school.

After graduating from the University of Oregon with a degree in rhetoric and communication and earning a law degree at Willamette University, Marshall began a career that would span the gamut of Oregon's criminal justice system, beginning with tribal justice and including prosecuting major crimes in Coos County, working as a litigator in the Department of Justice and finishing as the department's lead child advocacy attorney.

It would serve her well before a 13-member selection committee convened by U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden in 2009 to select three nominees for Oregon's U.S. attorney.

"The idea that your two chief law enforcers are going to be women is really out of the box in some ways," said Debbie Walsh, Director of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University. "But if you were going to tell me it happens in a state, Oregon would be one of the states."

While Marshall thought her experience with state law enforcement gave her an edge in the run for U.S. attorney,

she said Portland-area legal and political observers almost immediately cast doubt on her candidacy's viability.

"The media, the press was so different. I was criticized for being too young and too inexperienced," said Marshall, noting she graduated law school a year before one of the other people under consideration. "I think being a woman, you get a whole different set of criticisms."

Walsh said it's not uncommon for women in leadership to face uneven scrutiny, and managing the work-life balance sometimes requires masking personal obligations in order

tried to set. Chief among them is child exploitation.

Observing a system she thinks is in dire need of financial assistance and improved coordination at the state level, Marshall said she wants to take the idea of criminalization out of the process for victims of trafficking.

"Every time we find a child being trafficked on the street, (Department of Human Services) child welfare comes in and says, this child is at a risk for harm," she says.

Marshall would rather have the child treated as a dependent youth and kept out of the criminal system. But the problem, she said, is the state has nowhere to put them.

"Once they do that, then I can go and indict the pimp because I have a witness (but) that's the problem, I don't have these girls around long enough to take it to trial," Marshall said. "My concern is putting pimps in jail."

The combination of females as U.S. Attorney and attorney general isn't unprecedented nationally. California's attorney general is female, as are two of its four U.S. attorneys.

When former Kate Pflaumer was picked to be U.S. attorney for Western Washington in the early 1990s, women were picking up federal and state leadership positions. A woman led the Washington State Police and the FBI in the state, and Christine Gregoire was the attorney general. Pflaumer herself was nominated by U.S. Sen. Patty Murray.

"At the monthly gatherings of FBI (Special Agents in Charge), we used to joke that we were going to bring in cloth napkins, make it a proper luncheon," Pflaumer said.

Marshall said her time at the state level gave her needed preparation for the job of managing some of the most complex cases in Oregon's federal system. When she took office, she kept the same management team in place that preceded her, went personally to each employee's office and spoke with them privately, including those in Eugene and Medford.

It was, she said, the some of the best early training for the job.

"That's the best lesson for a lawyer, is learning who to listen to," she said, "and they're usually not people above you, they're people below you."

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to avoid seeming distracted by them.

"It's the kind of the thing where it sounds like the man should get the Nobel prize for going to his kids' soccer game," Walsh said. "For women, if you have a kid responsibility, you tell people you're going to the dentist."

After her name was forwarded by Wyden with two others to President Barack Obama — who made the pick — Marshall faced a nearly two-year wait for her Senate confirmation.

Her focus now is on the high-profile cases started under her watch or her predecessors', along with priorities she's

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