

Next in line to lead Russia probe: Rosenstein has respect

WASHINGTON (AP) — Some Democrats worry the appointment of a Jeff Sessions subordinate to oversee an investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election won't be a clean enough break from the embattled attorney general.

But the veteran prosecutor in line for the job may be uniquely politically palatable.

Rod Rosenstein, who faces his confirmation hearing next week for the role of deputy attorney general, was appointed top federal prosecutor in Maryland by George W. Bush and remained in the post for the entire Obama

administration. That staying power, extraordinary for a position that routinely turns over with changes in the White House, lends weight to the reputation he's cultivated as an apolitical law enforcement official.

"He is so well-respected. He cannot be influenced, he cannot be bought, he cannot be pressured because of outside political forces," said Baltimore criminal defense attorney Steven Silverman, who has known Rosenstein for years.



Rosenstein

Sessions recused himself from any Trump-Russia investigation Thursday after the Justice Department acknowledged he had spoken twice with the Russian ambassador last year and had failed

to disclose the contacts during his Senate confirmation process. Sessions said he had not tried to mislead anyone but could have been more careful in his answers. He planned to file amended testimony on Monday, a Justice Department spokesman said.

PENDLETON: Also considering adding management of the Vert to the position

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the end of the current fiscal year in June.

Neil Brown, a member of the city council and convention center commission, said he supported the move, which has nothing to do with Chrisman's performance.

"It's too much work for one person to do," he said.

Brown said Chrisman's part-timer status meant convention center office specialist Kathy Marshall had to fill in the gaps Chrisman wasn't able to cover.

In addition to increased responsibilities at the convention center, Brown said the city is also consid-

ering adding management of the Vert Auditorium to the position's responsibilities, a task that would be difficult for a part-timer to achieve.

Kennedy had convinced the city council to allocate money toward bringing more events to the Vert, but the plan was put on hiatus when he retired.

Hiring a new convention center manager means the city will have to add an administrative salary to its payroll.

While the current salary range for the convention center manager is between \$73,692-\$98,412 per year, Corbett wrote in the report that staff had done a salary survey to determine the pay

for the new position.

If the council approves the position, the new manager will earn between \$60,564 and \$80,892 annually to start, and would max out at \$108,000.

Corbett expects the salary will be covered partly by projected increases in convention center revenue.

According to human resources director Andrea Denton, Chrisman only earns salary as the airport manager, despite his other titles. He earns \$90,468 per year.

Chrisman did not return a request for comment.

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WATER: Sitz plans to stay with the coalition for two years before applying to law school

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Sitz is a former PHS athlete and Lantern Cup winner, the school's highest award for personal and classroom achievement. Her family comes from a cattle ranching background and she said rural issues have always informed her way of thinking — even after college in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Sitz graduated from Stanford in 2015, and followed that up with a one-year fellowship with the Bill Lane Center for the American West. It was there she became involved with a program called Water in the West, researching solutions to the region's increasing water shortage.

From there, Sitz said she began looking at opportunities in Oregon and came across the Northeast Oregon Water Association, or NOWA. That's the group working to negotiate new mitigated water rights for Umatilla and Morrow county farmers out of the Columbia River, a delicate and lengthy effort with potentially huge economic rewards.

Sitz reached out to J.R. Cook, executive director for NOWA and a board member for the Oregon Water Coalition. Cook said he felt Sitz would be a great fit for the water coalition, which formed in 1992 to educate and do outreach, but had largely become inactive and nearly dissolved last year.

"(Sitz) lit a fire under us," Cook said.

With Sitz on board, Cook said the coalition has been reborn. And though Sitz said she is still learning the ropes, she is already at work rebuilding their website and re-establishing their commu-

"Water is not going to become any less important in the future. It's just key to the economic engine of so many areas."

— Marika Sitz, Oregon Water Coalition

nity partnerships.

"It's a little bit about finding our place," she said.

Ray Kopacz, coalition vice president and manager of the Stanfield Irrigation District, said it will take some time to get themselves organized after years of sitting in limbo.

"It never really died. We just lost some key people who were helping run it," Kopacz said.

Sitz plans to stay with the coalition for two years before applying to law school. She said the relationships she builds now will be invaluable down the road.

"Water is not going to become any less important in

the future," she said. "It's just key to the economic engine of so many areas."

When Sitz leaves, Cook said they hope to continue recruiting new blood to carry on the work that's already been done. It has taken 30 years of work to get to where they are now, he said, and it will be up to the new guard to see many of these projects to fruition.

"The goal is to bring people Marika's age back our way to work for northeast Oregon," Cook said.

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FIRE: Forest Service spent \$2.1 billion fighting fires throughout the region

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people must do to contain them in the future.

On Wednesday, Hessburg spoke before a mostly full house at Maxey Hall on the campus of Whitman College in Walla Walla. The community had its own brush with the destructive Blue Creek Fire in July 2015 that burned 6,000 acres, 12 structures and nearly crept into the Mill Creek watershed.

While the prospect of megafires is a scary thought, Hessburg said it wasn't his goal to make people afraid — quite the opposite, actually.

"I want you to feel more powerful," Hessburg said. "We need to work toward making our forests fire-resilient again."

Hessburg, who lives in Wenatchee, Washington, relayed the experience of his own hometown battling the massive Sleepy Hollow blaze during the same 2015 wildlife season. That fire morphed into a nearly 3,000-acre inferno that destroyed 29 homes and three commercial businesses.

Less than two months later, Eastern Oregon would face a trio of monstrous fires: the Canyon Creek Complex near John Day, Grizzly Bear Complex outside of Troy and Comet-Windy Ridge Fire in Baker County. All together, those fires would torch nearly 300,000 acres, and another 43 homes would burn in Canyon Creek.

The Forest Service spent \$2.1 billion fighting fires throughout the region, though Hessburg said the toll was much higher in reality. Suppression costs are just one piece of the puzzle, he said. Combined with rebuilding infrastructure, lost property values and business revenue, the actual cost figures to be more than \$50 billion.

"As taxpayers, this should concern all of us," he said. Getting to the root of modern megafires requires

a look back at history. In 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt and forester Gifford Pinchot created the Forest Service. Five years later, the Great Fire of 1910 burned roughly 3 million acres across northeast Washington, northern Idaho and western Montana.

From then on, Hessburg said the Forest Service pledged to fight fires at all costs. It took about 25 years for the agency to get really good at fire suppression, and by 1934 the agency adopted the so-called "10 a.m. policy," which ordered every fire be put out by 10 a.m. the day after it was first reported.

The result, Hessburg said, has been decades of fire exclusion on the landscape, which has changed the composition of the forests to overly dense and crowded with vegetation. Past logging practices also removed older and larger trees from the forest, encouraging the growth of less fire-resilient species.

"This is when our forests started to become sick and unhealthy," Hessburg said.

Comparing historical and current photos, Hessburg pointed out how forests used to be a patchy mosaic of large trees and open grassy meadows, which kept fires low to the ground and low in intensity. Now forest fires have much more fuel to consume and climb their way up into the canopy of tree stands.

Climate change is also making summers warmer and extending fire season by months, Hessburg said, turning the forests into a powder keg. By 2050, data show the West could experience two or three times as much fire as it does now.

"Even the most conservative forecasts are pretty darn dire," he said.

Fire suppression alone is an incomplete solution, Hessburg said. What needs to happen is large-scale rehabilitation of the forests and rangeland using a variety of

management tools.

It will be an immense job, as Oregon and Washington have a combined 11.6 million acres in need of treatment to restore better fire behavior.

The first and perhaps most important step, Hessburg said, is restoring fire to its natural role on the landscape. He pointed to things like prescribed burns and managed wildfires, where a naturally caused, low-intensity blaze is allowed to run its natural course.

Fire is the most important natural process for forests in the West, Hessburg said. Not only does it increase future resilience, but some species depend on wildfire for survival — lodgepole pine cones will only open after a fire, while certain types of birds make their habitat in burned snags.

Mechanical thinning can also be a valuable tool if it's done in the right places, Hessburg said. The timber industry has a role to play, using the wood to make products such as lumber, chips and biomass for power plants.

Homeowners who live in the woods also need to consider thinning around their homes in an effort to keep their properties safer, Hessburg said. The general rule of thumb is a 30-foot buffer of defensible space.

"Continued development in the wildland-urban interface is putting a whole lot of stress on our firefighters," Hessburg said.

The Oregon Department of Forestry does have a program to work with homeowners on "firescaping" projects, and reimburse up to 75 percent of the cost.

By being proactive instead of reactive, Hessburg said local agencies and communities can help reduce the trend of megafires and restore forest and rangeland health.

"It's up to us," he said. "The question is, how do you want your fire and your smoke?"



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