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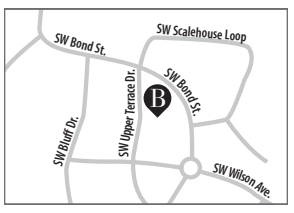

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LOCAL, STATE & REGION

Biden picks Wight to be Oregon's U.S. attorney

BY MAXINE BERNSTEIN
The Oregonian

President Joe Biden has nominated Natalie K. Wight, who is deputy chief of the organized and violent crime section of Oregon's U.S. Attorney's office, to serve as the top federal prosecutor in the state.

Wight

Wight, a 1992 graduate of Portland's Cleveland High School, has been working in the District of Oregon since 2012 and with the U.S. Department of Justice since 2003.

Wight, 47, was selected out of three finalists chosen from a pool of seven candidates who applied for the job.

"We strongly support President Biden's nomination of Natalie Wight to be the next U.S. Attorney for Oregon," said a joint statement from Oregon's U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley. "She brings an outstanding combination of leadership, integrity, independence and community connections to this crucial post. We look forward to advancing her through the Senate confirmation process."

Wight is one of five U.S. attorney nominations announced Monday by the Biden administration. The nominations now go to the Senate Judiciary Committee for confirmation.

"These individuals were chosen for their devotion to enforcing the law, their professionalism, their experience and credentials, their dedication to pursuing equal justice for all, and their commitment to the independence of the Department of Justice," said a news release from The White House.

Biden said he expects the new chief federal law enforcement officers to play key roles in helping support his effort to prosecute gun traffickers, put more police on the street and bolster community violence prevention programs.

Wight has supervised and prosecuted Native American tribal cases with a specialized focus on child exploitation investigations.

She was one of the prosecutors who handled the trial of Jason P. Schaefer, who was sentenced to 40 years in prison in 2019 for igniting a cigarette pack filled with explosive material as he was cornered in his car by members of the FBI-led Joint Terrorism Task Force. The Oct. 11, 2017, blast blew off two fingers on Schaefer's left hand and left Washington County Sheriff's Detective Jeremy Chedester, a member of the task force, with vertigo, ringing in his ear and a concussion.

Before working as a federal prosecutor in Oregon, she was an assistant U.S. attorney in the Northern District of California from 2008 to 2012. Wight also was an attorney at the Federal Bureau of Prisons from 2003 to 2008. She received her law degree from the University of Notre Dame Law School in 2003, masters in science from California State University in 2000, and bachelors of science degree from the College of Idaho in 1996.

She also was inducted into the Portland Interscholastic League Hall of Fame, after serving as captain of the woman's soccer team and women's basketball team and running track at Cleveland High School. In recent years, Wight has served as the high school's mock trial coach.

LOCAL BRIEFING

New principal hired for La Pine Middle School

Bend-La Pine Schools has hired La Pine Middle School's new principal, according to a news release issued Monday.

Barringer

Brian Barringer, a principal at Big Picture Learning College and Career Academy in Denver will serve in the school's lead role starting July 1, the news release said. He follows Principal Matt Montgomery, who has retired.

Superintendent Steven Cook said, "Barringer has great experience as a principal at a small school setting and is known for building strong relationships with staff, students and the broader community."

Barringer previously served as an assistant principal for three years, a middle and high school teacher for six years, and as an athletic director.

COVID-19 community levels for Central Oregon

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention monitors community levels of COVID-19 to help communities decide what prevention steps to take based on the latest data. Levels can be low, medium or high and are determined by looking at hospital beds being used, hospital admissions and the total number of new COVID-19 cases in an area.

The CDC listed the following levels for Central Oregon:
Deschutes County: Medium
Crook County: Medium
Jefferson County: Low

Precautions the CDC recommends for communities with low levels:
- Stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccines.
- Get tested if you have symptoms.

Additional precautions for communities with medium levels: If you are at high risk for severe illness, talk to your health care provider about whether you need to wear a mask and take other precautions.

— Bulletin staff reports

Sakari Farms near Tumalo keeps Indigenous plants going strong

BY BRADLEY W. PARKS
Oregon Public Broadcasting

The pond is full again at Upingaksraq Spring Alaska Schreiner's High Desert farm.

It's a welcome sight for Schreiner, who owns Sakari Farms, northwest of Tumalo on U.S. Highway 20.

Last summer, as drought punished Central Oregon, Schreiner's irrigation district stopped delivering water. She watched as the pond gradually disappeared, leaving a mud puddle behind.

Bradley W. Parks/OPB
Hopi red amaranth grows in starter trays in a greenhouse at Sakari Farms.

"I cried last year when I walked through the dry canal," Schreiner told Oregon Public Broadcasting. "I was pissed. I was like, 'There's nothing we can do.'"

Schreiner has rights to a little over 2 acre-feet of water, which makes its way to the farm from the Deschutes River through a series of pipes and canals.

She only got a fraction of that amount last year.

This year is looking worse.

Gov. Kate Brown has already declared drought emergencies in 16 Oregon counties, including Deschutes. That's the most ever for this time of year, and Oregon farmers like Schreiner are on edge.

"I'm not sure how to cope with going in this year knowing that there's less water or no water," Schreiner said.

Schreiner is Inupiaq, a member of the Valdez Native Tribe of Alaska and Chugach Alaska Native Corporation. Her tribal name is Upingaksraq, which means "the time when the ice breaks." She opened Sakari Botanicals in 2012 and Sakari Farms in 2018 to bolster and restore access to traditional foods for Indigenous people locally in Central Oregon and across the country.

Native people will send seeds to Sakari, which means "sweet." The farm will grow the plants, collect the new seeds and send them back, keeping Indigenous plant varieties going strong. Sakari also hosts farm education, tribal cooking classes and tribal community events.

Water has sustained that vision to this point, but now Schreiner knows that water is no longer a guarantee.

"All I can do is implement it practically," she said.

She's channeling the frustration she felt last year into solutions.

On a hill behind the farmhouse are four old chain-link fence panels surrounding a bare patch of dirt. Beneath the surface is an elaborate pattern of squash seeds, beans and corn — the three sisters.

Schreiner won't water the plot, but said she's hoping seedlings will soon emerge from the dirt. She said the moment will surely bring her to tears.

"It's literally your ancestors telling you thank you for trying this," Schreiner said.

The hilltop plot represents one of the best hopes for Sakari's future. Indigenous people, particularly the Hopi, have practiced dryland farming for thousands of years in semi-arid regions, relying solely on rain and snowmelt to grow crops.

"It's imperative that we look for guidance from Indigenous people on fire management, climate change, water usage, how we grow our crops, when, why," Schreiner said. "No one asks us how to do things. They just kinda push us in the corner. And that'll bite them, I think."

Schreiner is also installing more drip irrigation at Sakari and securing grant money to implement new technologies like weather stations and water sensors on-farm to improve efficiency.

Courtesy of Sakari Farms
Sakari Farms owner and Indigenous agriculturalist Upingaksraq Spring Alaska Schreiner. Schreiner grows traditional crops, and during the drought, she's trying dryland farming.

She said she's learned lessons on what not to do by watching other farmers fail. For example, Schreiner won't truck in water from elsewhere if her pond goes dry again this year.

"I'm still promoting all the farmers to grow as much food as they can and extend the seasons," Schreiner said. "But it's not natural, so that's where we're going to be ahead of the game."

Sakari is almost fully planted and will only plant once this year. Farm workers Harrison Hill and Kobe Stites were busy putting bean starts in the ground on a hot Wednesday in late May.

"The water that we did have to start out the season isn't always going to be here," Hill said. "We're going to have to learn how to use it most effectively."

Schreiner said if the water's shut off again, she'll cut off the farm plot-by-plot and seek financial relief for failed crops.

Still, the plants' resilience and that of the people who have grown those plants since time immemorial give Schreiner confidence — even in the face of Oregon's drier future.