

## High Plains Journal

### **Who's In, Who's Out and What to Watch for in Washington**

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**By Larry Dreiling**

Here we go with our now traditional column on who's in and who's out in key farm policy positions in Washington following the November elections.

For the first time in 16 years, Democrats control both houses of Congress and soon the White House. Along the High Plains and Midwest, a few changes are of note.

First, some familiar faces will join the Cabinet of new President Obama. They reflect what I said is Obama's policy pragmatism.

One of my picks from a Nov. 10 column on choices for secretary of agriculture (A pick noted in such crazy places as The Atlantic.) panned out as former Iowa Gov. Tom Vilsack was selected. He's pro-ethanol and pro-livestock with a reasoned approach toward payment limits.

So reasoned to production ag is Vilsack, that the Organic Grocers Association panned the pick as "Change we can't believe in," a play on the Obama campaign slogan.

Production agriculture issues likely will be on Vilsack's back burner at USDA for some time, as a spiraling economy will cause the new ag boss to concentrate on increased spending for nutrition programs. We already are seeing more Americans apply for food stamps and other such assistance.

For the most part, these programs have been considered among those that have real benefit to those in need. Watch for them to be Vilsack's focus.

Obama also selected Sen. Ken Salazar, D-CO, as secretary of interior. Many of my Republican contacts think this is among the best Cabinet picks the new president made.

Salazar, while Colorado Attorney General, sued the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, an agency he'll now be running, to keep prairie dogs off the endangered species list. He thinks they're pests. We'll see what happens as time passes if his opinion changes.

Salazar's replacement, selected by Gov. Bill Ritter, is Michael Bennet, currently superintendent of the Denver Public Schools. Bennet is expected to retain Salazar's seat on the Senate Agriculture Committee.

Bennet grew up and attended schools back east. Who knows if he'll keep up the contact with agriculture Ken Salazar did in his time in the Senate.

Ken Salazar's brother, John, who represents Colorado's 3rd District from the family's San Luis Valley ranch, will move from a position as a Democrat on the House Agriculture Committee to a place on the House Appropriations Committee.

This is a big-time appointment for John Salazar, who no doubt will take a place on the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, chaired by the Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut. He'll be an interesting counterpoint to the colorful DeLauro, and will likely give her plenty of knowledge about what people in production agriculture do all day.

One new member of the Senate Agriculture Committee will likely come aboard as former secretary of agriculture and Nebraska governor Mike Johanns replaces Chuck Hagel.

Oklahoma will take a high place in agriculture as Rep. Frank Lucas moves up in seniority to be ranking minority member of the House Agriculture Committee, replacing the term-limited Bob Goodlatte of Virginia.

Lucas is what city slickers would call an "Honest to God cowboy," complete with broken nose and a chipped tooth from working cattle. He's led Republicans on the Conservation, Credit, Energy and Research subcommittee and won big battles back home to keep open most of the Farm Service Agency offices in the state.

While it may be some time before Lucas achieves his dream of chairing the committee, he's sure to work well with current chair Collin Peterson of Minnesota in keeping the open, bipartisan nature of the committee intact.

Wyoming switches House members as Barbara Cubin retires and Cynthia Lummis is elected. A former Miss Frontier Days, Lummis is a member of an old-line ranching family. A lawyer and former state treasurer, Lummis—even as a freshman—could be a formidable presence about energy issues on the ag committee, given Wyoming's positions on wind and solar power.

Kansas, meanwhile, will lose a little clout on the House Agriculture Committee, as incumbent Democrat Nancy Boyda was defeated for re-election by Republican State Treasurer Lynn Jenkins in the state's 2nd District.

Boyda, simply put, ran a bad campaign and ignominiously was the only Democrat to lose a House seat in what was a year of big gains for the Ds. Jenkins isn't taking a seat on the committee as Republican Jerry Moran already holds a seat there.

Next week, a look ahead, as the 2010 election cycle begins in the Colorado 4th District and the Kansas 1st District.