

# Landrieu begins process of finding a replacement

*She vows to consult with local leaders*

By Bruce Alpert  
Staff writer

WASHINGTON — Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., is vowing to consult with local leaders and members of the legal community to develop a short list of potential replacements for U.S. Attorney Jim Letten, who resigned Thursday.

She said she plans to submit the list to Attorney General Eric Holder and President Barack Obama.

"The people of the Eastern District expect and deserve an open and efficient process for determining their next U.S. attorney, and I look forward to working with Attorney General Holder and the entire community to find the most qualified individual for the post," Landrieu said Thursday.

Landrieu praised Letten for his record of "rooting out public corruption."

But she called his resignation a "necessary step forward to toward maintaining public trust in an institution charged with fighting corruption and keeping the people of the Eastern District safe."

Letten's announcement came eight months into a scandal involving anonymous online commenting by high-ranking prosecutors in his office, including the recent revelation that Letten's longtime first assistant, Jan Mann, was involved.

Democrats mentioned as possible candidates for the U.S. attorney's job include New Orleans white-collar attorney Kenneth Polite, Louisiana Democratic Party Chairwoman Karen Carter Peterson and former New Orleans city attorney and current Entergy New Orleans CEO Charles Rice.

Others names being floated locally include Kim Boyle, a partner at the New Orleans law firm of Phelps Dunbar; Keva Landrum-Johnson, an Orleans Parish criminal district judge; Criminal District Judge

Karen Herman, who served as prosecutor under former New Orleans District Attorney Harry Connick; Civil District Court Clerk Dale Atkins; Municipal Court Judge Desiree Charbonnet; and attorney Allen Miller, also of Phelps Dunbar.

Sen. David Vitter, R-La., Thursday offered two additional potential choices: New Orleans District Attorney Leon Cannizzaro and Jones Walker attorney Pauline Harden. Both are Democrats.

Harden previously worked for the U.S. attorney's office in New Orleans, serving as both first assistant U.S. attorney and chief of the Criminal Division.

Steven Gonzalez, 30, a Kenner attorney who was a prosecutor in Cannizzaro's office for two years, is also reportedly in the mix. Gonzalez declined to discuss who had approached him, but said he's Cannizzaro's nephew by marriage (his father is the brother of Cannizzaro's wife).

Now that Letten has resigned, it's likely that others will express interest in the post.

A president generally relies on recommendations from the highest ranking member of his own party — in this case Landrieu. Landrieu has put her chief of staff, Jane Campbell in charge of the initial search. Campbell, a former mayor of Cleveland, Ohio, also oversaw the 2009 selection process that ended with Landrieu recommending Democrat President Obama keep Letten as U.S. attorney, though he is a Republican.

Louisiana's congressional representatives offered praise for Letten, mixed with some disappointment that two of his prosecutors would have made comments on pending cases in the comment section of NOLA.com. Just a few months ago, it appeared that Letten, already the longest-tenured U.S. attorney, would be reappointed by President Obama, given his reputation as a corruption fighter and several pending high-profile cases, including a criminal investigation of former New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin.

Rep. Steve Scalise, R-Jefferson, said Letten "changed the culture of Louisiana by instituting a zero-tolerance policy

against political corruption."

"I am saddened by Jim's departure as U.S. attorney, and I thank him for his years of honest hard work and service to our state," Scalise said. "He leaves behind the legacy of a courageous leader who changed the corrupt 'Louisiana way' and revitalized the public's faith in our political and justice systems. Jim Letten leaves behind very large shoes to fill, and it is incumbent upon President Obama to choose a replacement who shares Jim's steadfast intolerance toward political corruption."

Vitter said he was "really saddened by this news because Jim has done such a terrific job. His work has really turned the tide against public corruption in Louisiana. But this fight isn't over. We need a very qualified, seasoned prosecutor like Leon Cannizzaro or Pauline Hardin as our new U.S. attorney at this critical time, not a typical political appointee or someone with modest prosecutorial experience."

Vitter, who had pressed newly elected President Obama to reappoint Letten, a Republican, in 2009 after the president's 2008 election, declined to give the veteran prosecutor a full vote of confidence after revelations that a second deputy in his office had made comments, some of them rather pointed, on NOLA.com. Vitter had said the revelations raised "very serious" concerns.

Rep. Cedric Richmond, D-New Orleans, who last month expressed concern it was taking a long time to investigate the posting of comments by Letten deputies, offered Letten thanks Thursday "for his nearly 12-year tenure as U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Louisiana."

"I hope Mr. Letten's (successor) will continue to build on his legacy and accomplishments as the longest serving U.S. attorney in the country," Richmond said. "Moving forward, I am committed to working with the Department of Justice to address the recent allegations of misconduct."

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