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## Sources: Salazar accepts Interior post

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*The Denver Post*

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Barack Obama leads a get-out-the-vote Rally for Colorado 7th Congressional candidate Ed Perlmutter in Aurora in October, 2006. U.S. Sen. Ken Salazar /THE DENVER POST | KATHRYN OSLEY

U.S. Sen. Ken Salazar has agreed to accept a Cabinet appointment as President-elect Barack Obama's interior secretary pending the outcome of a background check, multiple sources told The Denver Post on Monday.

Democratic sources who asked not to be named because they were not authorized to speak on Salazar's behalf said that the first-term senator interviewed for the position last week and is all but certain to be appointed to Obama's Cabinet.

Speaking to the media in Chicago on Monday, Obama said he would name the interior secretary later this week.

Salazar's pending selection was revealed on the same day Denver Public Schools Superintendent Michael Bennet learned that he would not be offered the job of education secretary. Also

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### Senate Seat

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Monday, sources close to Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper said he is among several candidates to be transportation secretary in the Obama administration.

Salazar met with members of Obama's transition team in Chicago at the end of last week to discuss a possible appointment to the Interior Department post, sources close to the transition team said. The position has not been formally offered, but no other candidates are known to be undergoing the requisite background checks, and multiple sources said Salazar has signaled his willingness to give up his Senate seat for the job.

Reached on Monday, Salazar would say only, "No comment," and referred questions to his spokesman, who also declined to answer questions.

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The interior secretary oversees federal agencies including the National Park Service and the U.S. Geological Survey. Interior has about 70,000 employees and a budget approaching \$17 billion. It is responsible for managing 500 million acres in the U.S. — about one-fifth of the nation's land.

If Salazar is confirmed for the post, Gov. Bill Ritter, a fellow Democrat, would name his replacement. Ritter spokesman Evan Dreyer said the governor "will move as quickly as possible" to make that move once Salazar's appointment is formally announced.

That prospect has set off a scramble among Democrats eager to fill out the remainder of Salazar's term, which runs through 2010.

Names floated as possible successors include Hickenlooper, U.S. Rep. John Salazar of Manassa, U. S. Rep. Ed Perlmutter of Golden, U.S. Rep. Diana DeGette of Denver, former U.S. Attorney Tom Strickland, outgoing state House Speaker Andrew Romanoff and Bennet.

Hickenlooper, serving his second term as mayor, is considered a business-savvy Democrat. He declined to say whether he would be interested in filling Salazar's shoes.

"There are a lot of possibilities out there, and rather than engaging in endless speculation, I choose to stay focused on running the city," he said in a statement.



Sen. Ken Salazar on the floor of the Pepsi Center during the second day of the Democratic National Convention on Tuesday, August 26, 2008 in Denver, Colo. (THE DENVER POST | JOE AMON)

Strickland, executive vice president of UnitedHealth Group, was the Democratic nominee for Senate in 1996 and 2002. He lost both times to now-retiring U.S. Sen. Wayne Allard.

However, Colorado has changed in the past few years as voters have aligned themselves more and more with Democrats.

"At this point, the rumors about Ken Salazar aren't confirmed," he said. "But he has been an outstanding senator and would be an outstanding interior secretary."

Steve Welchert, a Democratic consultant in Denver, said Ritter must appoint someone who can win a statewide race in 2010.

He cited Perlmutter, with whom he has previously worked, and Hickenlooper as politicians with "the fundraising capacity and the vote-getting appeal."



Sen. Ken Salazar, left, and President-elect Barack Obama (Emanuel Dunana, AFP/Getty Images)

He said Perlmutter's suburban district positions him to run well in conservative areas of the state. Meanwhile, Hickenlooper has grown so popular that many of those living in the Denver suburbs think of him as their mayor, too, Welchert said.

He added that John Salazar, who holds the 3rd Congressional District seat, might not want to give up the powerful role he recently gained when he was appointed to the House Appropriations Committee, which sets federal funding priorities.

"Who is more powerful?" Welchert asked. "A member of the House Appropriations or a freshman senator? It's not even close. Appropriations."

John Salazar's office did not return telephone calls seeking comment.

He had previously been suggested as a possible pick for secretary of agriculture and said he had not ruled out that job.

Already, those close to some of those in the running for the appointment were talking up their

preferred candidates.

DeGette has received calls from people encouraging her to seek the Senate seat should it become vacant, said her spokesman, Kristofer Eisenla.

"This would be a pleasant surprise if Sen. Salazar is selected," he said. "She thinks he is a friend and colleague, and having a strong Western voice like Sen. Salazar in the Interior Department would be great. Right now she's waiting for official confirmation from the Obama transition team and Sen. Salazar."

Romanoff said he would be interested.

"I'm looking for a way to make a contribution to the state," said Romanoff, who is being forced out of the statehouse by term limits. The Denver Democrat is also a finalist to replace Republican Secretary of State Mike Coffman.

Members of Perlmutter's camp said they'd be shocked if he didn't make the governor's list of potential appointees and believed that the congressman, who was overwhelmingly re-elected to a second term this year, would be interested.

Sen. Salazar was an energetic campaigner for Obama in Colorado, delivering a vital swing state that has long sided with Republicans.

He is a former director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources, where he wrote the Great Outdoors Colorado Amendment that used lottery proceeds for land conservation. He also was Colorado's former attorney general. He is a member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

Salazar would be the second Coloradan to become interior secretary this decade. Gale Norton served

that role from 2001 to 2006 under President George W. Bush. She received criticism from environmentalists and praise from industry interests.

Environmentalists ranged from cautiously optimistic to outright enthusiastic Monday at the prospect that Salazar would end up as interior secretary.

"Ken knows the West and Western issues, particularly natural-resource issues," said Elise Jones, executive director of the Colorado Environmental Coalition. "One thing you can count on is that the state of Colorado will be listened to and consulted, which will be a welcomed change."

Noah Greenwald, director of biodiversity programs at the Center for Biological Diversity, said he was "cautiously optimistic" but concerned that Salazar did not have much of a record regarding science issues.

But Harris Sherman, current director of Colorado's Department of Natural Resources, praised the pick.

"There is no better person in the nation to step into the position of interior secretary," Sherman said in a written statement. "He will bring the needed balance, experience and judgment to our nation's natural-resource programs during these pivotal times. This is great for the West and the entire country."

*Staff writers Michael Riley, Mark Jaffe and Jessica Fender contributed to this report.*

## Ken Salazar

Age: 53

Home: Denver and Los Rincones, family ranch near Manassa

Family: Wife, Hope; two daughters, Andrea and Melinda; granddaughter, Mireya

Education: Bachelor's degree in political science, Colorado College, 1977; juris doctorate, University of Michigan, 1981.

Career: U.S. Senate, 2005 to present; Colorado attorney general, 1999-2004; lawyer in private practice, 1994-98; executive director, Colorado Department of Natural Resources, 1990-94; chief legal counsel, Gov. Roy Romer, 1986-90; lawyer in private practice, 1981-86.

Senate committees: Finance; Agriculture; Energy and Natural Resources; Select Committee on Ethics; and Special Committee on Aging

*Sources: U.S. Senate and Post archives; Photo: Emanuel Dunana, AFP/Getty Images*

## One of these people could be Colorado's next U.S. senator

If Sen. Ken Salazar, D-Colo., becomes the next U.S. Secretary of the Interior, his unexpired term through 2010 will be filled by an appointee named by Gov. Bill Ritter (who could, if he chooses, appoint himself.)

*Among those mentioned as potential appointees, in alphabetical order:*

Michael Bennet, Denver Public Schools superintendent

Bennet, 44, an early supporter of President-elect Barack Obama, said he was told Monday he will not become U.S. Secretary of Education. Bennet has served as Denver superintendent since July 2005, leading the district through myriad changes and reforms. Bennet was formerly chief of staff under

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Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper and managing director for the Anschutz Investment Co. in Denver. He was editor-in-chief of the Yale Law Journal and has a law degree from the Ivy League school. Bennet is married to environmental attorney Susan Daggett. They have three daughters and live in Denver.

U.S. Rep. Diana DeGette, D-Denver

DeGette, 51, was first elected to represent Colorado's First District in 1996 and holds leadership positions, including chief deputy whip and vice chair of the committee on energy and commerce. An advocate for embryonic stem-cell research, her book, "Sex, Science and Stem Cells: Inside the Right Wing Assault on Reason," was published this year.

"DeGette graduated from Denver's South High School, received her B.A. magna cum laude from Colorado College in 1979 and her J.D. from New York University School of Law in 1982," according to her biography. "She served two terms in the Colorado House of Representatives serving as Assistant Minority Leader from 1993-1995." DeGette is married to attorney Lino Lipinsky. They have two daughters and a dog named Charlie."

Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper

Hickenlooper, 56, was elected mayor in 2003 and re-elected in 2007, touting a platform of civic engagement and public investment, including tax hikes and bonds approved by voters. A former geologist, he helped revitalize lower downtown Denver through ownership of the Wynkoop Brewing Company. He helped raise tens of millions of dollars for Denver to host the Democratic National Convention in August.

Hickenlooper graduated with an English degree from Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn., in

1974, and earned his master's in geology there in 1980. He and wife Helen Thorpe have a son.

U.S. Rep. Ed Perlmutter, D-Golden

Perlmutter, 55, won election in 2006 to represent Colorado's 7th Congressional district, winning an open seat. He serves on the Financial Services Committee and Homeland Security Committee.

A graduate of the University of Colorado law school, he worked in private practice and served as a Colorado state senator from 1994 through 2002, leaving due to term limits. Perlmutter and wife Deanna announced in April that they were filing for divorce. Perlmutter has three daughters, the eldest of whom has epilepsy, which "has led him to be an outspoken champion for stem cell research," according to his biography.

Colorado House Speaker Andrew Romanoff

Romanoff, who is leaving office because of term limits, is one of three finalists to become Colorado Secretary of State. Romanoff, 42, led an unsuccessful effort at the ballot to get voter approval of Amendment 59, which would have directed tens of millions of state revenues annually into a savings account for schools. Romanoff, who is single, has "a bachelor's degree at Yale and a master's degree in public policy at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. He is completing a law degree from the University of Denver," according to his biography. A self-described policy wonk, Romanoff has won plaudits from colleagues of both parties.

U.S. Rep. John Salazar, D-Manassa

Those close to the Salazars have said they would urge Gov. Bill Ritter to appoint John Salazar to his younger brother's Senate seat, if vacated. John Salazar, 55, was first elected to Congress in 2004.

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He has been mentioned as a possible appointee to head the U.S. Department of Agriculture, but that buzz dimmed with his recent appointment to the powerful House Appropriations Committee,

John Salazar grew up on a family farm in the San Luis Valley that had no electricity or running water. Before serving in Congress, he worked full time as a potato seed farmer and cattle rancher. He is an Army veteran and a former state legislator. John and wife Mary Lou have been married for 30 years, with three sons and one grandson.

Tom Strickland

The former U.S. attorney for Colorado is currently executive vice president for UnitedHealthGroup Inc. in Minneapolis.

Strickland has ties to Democrats at nearly every level of government. He was managing partner of Hogan & Hartson's Denver office and oversaw the creation of Great Outdoors Colorado, which uses lottery dollars to help fund wildlife programs, trails, parks and conservation efforts. In 1996 and 2002, he ran unsuccessfully for the Colorado U.S. Senate seat won and defended by Sen. Wayne Allard, whose successor will be Democratic Rep. Mark Udall.

*Sources: Post archives and official biographies*