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Why 'Big Luther' is the man to fill Sessions's shoes in the Senate

BY ALLEN MENDENHALL, CONTRIBUTOR - 12/07/16 01:12 PM EST

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It's an exciting time to be from Alabama.

Judge William Bill Pryor of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit, the former attorney general of Alabama, has been mentioned as a favorite among potential nominees to the U.S. Supreme Court, and President-elect Donald Trump has tapped Alabama Sen. Jeff Sessions another former attorney general of Alabama to serve as the next attorney general of the United States.

The question is, who will fill Sessions's Senate seat if he is confirmed as attorney general?

> From the archive: Understanding Sen. Jeff Sessions, the next U.S. attorney general https://t.co/9615VpNSzD pic.twitter.com/E47pRz3BXW
>
> NPR (@NPR) November 18, 2016

The best choice, in my view, is Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange, who on Tuesday announced that he will run for the seat in a special election even if Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley nominates someone else on an interim basis.

Full disclosure: I served as an assistant attorney general in Strange's office. I respect and admire him. What follows, however, is an honest and (I hope) objective statement of the reasons why Strange is ready and qualified to serve as a U.S. senator.

Strange has demonstrated a principled willingness to fight corruption, taking on members of his own party despite the obvious political risks. In January of 2013, his office began investigating Alabama Speaker of the House Mike

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Hubbard. Strange recused himself from the case and appointed special prosecutors to conduct the investigation. Earlier this year, jurors found Hubbard guilty of 12 of 23 felony ethics charges involving the use of his public office for private gain.

Now Strange's office is investigating Bentley, the very man who will appoint Sessions's successor. Bentley faces possible impeachment after allegations of an extramarital affair led to scrutiny of actions he's taken as governor.

After the 2010 Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill, Strange was appointed to serve as the coordinating counsel for the Gulf Coast States. In that capacity, he oversaw five years of litigation that resulted in a more than $2 billion settlement with BP, including $10 million to be paid directly to the Alabama attorney general's Office.

Strange's accomplishments and influence aren't just local. He's chairman of the Republican Attorneys General Association (RAGA) and has been at the forefront of RAGA's efforts to contest regulatory and federal overreach.

He recently led a coalition of states to protect small businesses from the Persuader Advice Exemption Rule and joined 24 states that succeeded in blocking implementation of the Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Power Plan when the U.S. Supreme Court granted their application for a stay.

When the U.S. Congress failed to push back against President Obama and the federal government, despite the rise of the Tea Party and Republican majorities in the House and the Senate, Strange and other attorneys general took up the cause.

Strange fought ObamaCare, the Obama administration's executive actions on immigration and amnesty, the joint guidance on transgender bathrooms issued by the Department of Justice and the Department of Education, and the efforts of Democratic attorneys general to abuse subpoena powers to prosecute think tanks and fossil-fuel companies for positions on climate change.

After the death of Justice Antonin Scalia, Strange supported Republicans on the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee who refused to hold hearings or votes on Obama's nominee to the high court, Merrick Garland. Justice Scalia was a scholar and a patriot, Strange said. He influenced an entire generation to return to the text and original meaning of the Constitution.

Strange is a sought-after speaker with a national reputation that his rivals for the Senate seat lack. He has spoken at the Federalist Society National Lawyers Convention, for instance, and at the judicial education program in the Law & Economics Center at George Mason University.

Strange has already filed the requisite paperwork with federal election

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authorities. He holds statewide office and thus enjoys name recognition that other state senators or members of the U.S. Congress have yet to earn.

Big Luther, as he's called in light of his height I he's six feet, ten inches tall I has proven that he appeals to voters beyond his own district in Alabama. And unlike other candidates, he's built a national campaign team that's operational today.

Bentley has said that he'll appoint someone who Imust uphold the Constitution, value the rights of the Second Amendment, the rights of the states, support pro-life issues, implement a strong national security policy and support domestic job creation.I Strange meets these criteria and deserves the job.

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