This morning, EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler announced that Assistant Administrator Bill Wehrum will be stepping down at the end of this month.

The language of EPA's press release seems intended to suggest that the departure was voluntary, but the resignation comes amid ongoing scrutiny about the Assistant Administrator's connections to a number of industry clients he represented as a lawyer and lobbyist prior to his time at EPA. Watchdogs have suggested that the Assistant Administrator violated an ethics pledge when he took meetings with former clients after he moved to EPA, and he has been the subject of an ethics probe by the House Energy and Commerce Committee. When he appeared at a hearing regarding the Administration's proposed fuel economy standards rollback rule last week, he skirted questions about his connection to industry clients who met with EPA while the rule was being developed.

For now, Assistant Administrator Wehrum is being replaced by Principal Assistant Administrator Anne Idsal. Who is she? Here are a few things we know:

- **She's fuzzy on climate science.** In a 2017 interview with the Texas Observer, Idsal said there was "still a lot of ongoing science" and that "climate has been changing since the dawn of time"; she also questioned the "extent" of man-made climate change, saying that while it was "possible that humans have some type of impact on climate change," she was uncertain as to the degree of the influence. That position isn't inconsistent with the line toed by other administration officials, including Wehrum himself, who in last week's hearing refused to affirmatively state he believes in climate change.
- **She's not big on enforcement or regulating industry.** Before coming to headquarters, Idsal was EPA Regional Administrator for Region 6, based out of Texas, and, prior to that, worked at Texas' General Land Office and as assistant general counsel at the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). While at TCEQ she expressed skepticism about enforcement actions against polluters, saying: "I want to find a way to [say] 'yes' in every possible situation where we've got the legal justification to do so. But recognizing that we sometimes have to enforce because that is your only avenue." That approach is consistent with sharp declines in EPA enforcement actions during the Trump era. Idsal's time at EPA Region 6 was marked by efforts to replace an Obama-era plan to reduce haze with an emissions trading program that critics said would not actually lower health-jeopardizing sulfur dioxide emissions from the power sector.

- **She hails from Texas and is well-connected to the Republican Party establishment there.** Before attending law school at Baylor, Idsal worked as an aide to Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX) in his office and on the Senate Judiciary Committee; she also interned on the Bush-Cheney campaign in 2004. Her mother served on the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission during the George W. Bush Administration and her maternal grandmother was an ambassador to the U.K. during the Ford years. But my favorite fun fact about Idsal is that her mother's family owns the ranch where Dick Cheney famously shot Harry Whittington during a bird hunt in 2006!

It remains to be seen whether Acting Assistant Administrator Idsal will become Assistant Administrator Idsal, but in the meanwhile, it appears we can expect more of the same under Idsal's leadership.

Photo credit: Dallas Morning News