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# REPORT TO THE WYOMING STATE BAR

*Barton R. Voigt, Chief Justice\**

September 12, 2008

I am pleased to appear before you again to update the Bar on the past year's happenings in Wyoming's court system. I won't bore you with case load statistics, but will comment only that all of our court levels seem to see a slow but steady growth in that regard. The mineral industry boom has created particular stress in a few areas, with Sweetwater County being a prime example. We have begun discussions there that we hope will result in a new courthouse and at least one new judicial position.

Speaking of judges, I guess I should have begun this message by mentioning the retirement of long-time Fifth Judicial District Court Judge Gary P. Hartman. Judge Hartman was on the bench for 25 years. Although he will be sorely missed in the judiciary, Judge Hartman has not exactly retired. Governor Freudenthal has hired him as a special advisor on juvenile issues. We wish him well in that endeavor, just as we wish Judge Skar well in his attempt to fill Judge Hartman's shoes up in the Big Horn Basin. The Board of Judicial Policy and Administration and the Supreme Court, after studying the case loads in the four counties of the Fifth Judicial Circuit, determined that Judge Skar's replacement should reside in Washakie County, which is centrally located between Hot Springs County and Big Horn County, and has both the best court facilities and the largest caseload. Judge Waters will remain in Park County.

The retirement bug also struck in Laramie County, where District Judge Nick Kalokathis hung up his robe. Judge Kalokathis has been a fixture in Wyoming's judiciary for two decades and, like Judge Hartman, will be greatly missed. Judge Kalokathis quietly provided intellectual leadership to the judicial branch for all the years he was on the bench. While the void left by his departure will be felt for a while, we expect great things from his replacement, Judge Michael K. Davis, whose appointment was greeted by universal approbation.

Another change in the district bench was yesterday's appointment by the governor of Marv Tyler as district judge in Sublette County. That position was created during the last session of the legislature in response to the expanding work load in the Ninth Judicial District. The boom in the Pinedale area has increased

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\* Barton R. Voigt was raised in Thermopolis, Wyoming. He obtained a B.A. and M.A. in American History, as well as a J.D., at the University of Wyoming. He practiced law in his home town for ten years, serving as Hot Springs County and Prosecuting Attorney for two terms. After two years as a county judge in Gillette, he was a district judge in Douglas for eight years. He was appointed to the Supreme Court on March 29, 2001, and became Chief Justice on July 1, 2006.

the work load to such an extent that it was no longer feasible for the judges in Jackson and Lander to provide sufficient coverage by periodic travel. We are hopeful that Judge Tyler will also be able to help out in Green River, and he will be the logical person to cover conflict cases in Afton. Please congratulate soon-to-be Judge Tyler the next time you see him.

Skipping next to the remodeling of the Supreme Court Building, I am pleased to report that the work is, relatively speaking, still on schedule. We expect to move back in within a month. We are confident that all who see our new facility—especially the courtroom—will be well pleased with the result. We are confident that the stateliness and expanse of the courtroom will produce even better oral arguments than the good ones to which we have become accustomed.

As you all know, a good part of the Court's energy and attention of late has been directed toward information technology. Within the past year, we have completed the installation of an electronic case management system in the Supreme Court and electronic filing of briefs is now required for both criminal and civil appeals. The trial courts will not be far behind. We are also working with law enforcement across the state in developing an electronic citation system that will allow electronic data entry into both law enforcement and judicial systems. In a somewhat related effort, we have obtained the agreement of the Sheriff's and Chief's Association, and the Wyoming Association of Municipalities to consider implementing a uniform municipal criminal code for the purpose of enhancing data transfer among all interested agencies. And finally, we will be asking the legislature in January to fund a new computer system for the Wyoming State Bar, to better communication between the Bar and the Court.

There are lots of other things going on in the judiciary, but I will mention only two more projects. Last year, the legislature established a Court Security Commission, whose mission is to study all of Wyoming's courthouses and to identify what must be done to make them safe for judges, staff members, attorneys and litigants, and the public. As part of that effort, the Supreme Court also sponsored six sessions of security training for court personnel. These sessions, put on by the National Center for State Courts, were attended by over 200 judges, clerks, court reporters, administrative assistants, and court security officers.

Lastly, I will mention another new committee project, this one being created by the Board of Judicial Policy and Administration. The judicial branch has never had a formal policy regarding public access to court records. Individual clerks have been left to guess as to what may or may not be a public record, and individual judges and clerks have developed their own policies as to what to make available to the public. The development of electronic records has brought more attention to this issue, as more and more demands for records are received. In response, the BJPA created an Access to Court Records committee whose membership includes not just judges and clerks, but representatives from the county attorney's

association and from the attorney general's office. We had our first meeting in late August and expect soon to have the outline of a policy ready for review by the BJA.

I have not mentioned all of our endeavors, but I hope I hit the major ones. Please stop by the Supreme Court Building any time after about mid-October and take a look at what we have done with the place. We are proud of it, and we want the citizens of Wyoming also to be proud of it.

Thank you.