

Wyoming District Judges Conference

Business Meeting

April 27, 2023

The Spring 2023 meeting of the District Judges Conference was held in Casper at the Natrona County Townsend Justice Center. Present in person at the meeting in Casper were Judges Tom Campbell, Steve Sharpe, Catherine Rogers, Peter Froelicher, Dawnessa Snyder, Misha Westby, Rick Lavery, Joe Bluemel, Suzannah Robinson, James Kaste, Darci Phillips, James “Mike” Causey, Matt Castano, Catherine Wilking, Dan Forgey, Kerri Johnson, Josh Eames, Scott Peasley, Jason Conder, Melissa Owens, and Kate McKay.

Absent were Judges Bill Simpson, Bobbi Overfield, Stuart Healy, Ben Kirven, and Ed Buchanan.

Chairman Forgey called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

Chief Justice Fox was invited to be present for the limited purpose of reporting to the Conference as noted below.

Chief Justice Fox assisted in the HR Committee report as noted below and reported the following:

- 1. That there is talk of legislatively changing the judicial selection process from the merit system to an election.*
- 2. That the Wyoming Judicial Council has adopted a strategic plan from the issues presented in the May 2022 survey.*
 - a. From that plan the Council is looking to test a court navigator program and*
 - b. There will be a legislative push for more administrative support staff including a public information officer and grant writer.*
- 3. That the Administrative Office of the Courts received three new positions this last year.*
- 4. That pay raises for judges and judicial branch employees remains a priority.*

After reporting, she departed from the meeting. Only members of the Conference were present for discussions and all business.

Minutes of the December 9, 2022 business meeting were presented and reviewed. It was moved and the motion to accept the minutes was seconded. The Conference approved the minutes.

The District Judges Conference Treasurer’s Report dated April 20, 2022 was presented and reviewed. It was moved and the motion to accept that report was seconded the motion. The Conference approved the report.

Old Business

Committee Reports –

Human Relations (HR) Committee: As noted above, Chief Justice Fox was invited and with District Judges Dan Forgey and Peter Froelicher reported that the committee is working on how it will recommend to the Wyoming Judicial Council, the money the legislature allocated to the judiciary for pay raises will be distributed or implemented. It was explained

that a compensation model has been developed to address employee compensation within the judicial branch, excluding judges. The model is based on the “Hay” method or study. That method or study was used by the executive branch in its presentation to the legislature to receive money for raises. It is a scoring system where job descriptions are generated, and points awarded to those job descriptions based upon skills determined necessary for that position. Those skills include “know how,” problem solving, and accountability. The committee reported that after having received input from judges, it was close to finalizing job descriptions for employees.

After Justice Fox left the meeting, Judges Forgey and Froelicher sought feedback on whether the conference preferred the money the legislature granted be used to bring judicial branch employees as close to market as possible (if that option is chosen, 26 judicial branch employees would receive no raise); provide raises to all employees; or implement some form of hybrid where all branch employees receive some additional compensation and the majority of money is used to get as many judicial branch employees closer to market. A discussion ensued and direction was given to Judges Forgey and Froelicher. No action was taken.

Wyoming Judicial Council/JBI Update: Judge Wilking gave an update on the JBI process and the Wyoming Judicial Council. She reported that JBI will be sunset in December. She also reported on the Fee Waiver Rule proposal and asked that any feedback, in addition to that provided in the meeting be sent to her by May 15th.

Docket Review Committee: Judge Forgey reported that he and judges Lavery and Rogers serve on this committee and have since the inception of the rule. It was reported that all District Court judges have timely provided their first report as of 12/31/22. After reviewing all reports, the committee reached out and followed up with a very small number of judges to inquire of their needs. The committee inquiries were well received, and the committee determined that no further action was warranted or helpful. It was unanimously reported by the committee that the rule and first reporting period were successful. Conference members were reminded that the second reporting period is scheduled to end 6/30/23 and that Judge Bluemel would be sending the materials that all judges are required to complete and send in. No action was recommended, and none was taken.

Legislative Liaison and Legislative Relations Committees: Judge Rogers reported on both committees. She explained that the Legislative Liaison Committee is solely a committee of the conference, and its purpose is to support our conference. The Legislative Relations Committee is a committee of the Wyoming Judicial Council comprised of judges from all three courts. Its purpose is to address policy issues of the entire judicial branch with the legislature. It was affirmed that the conference will continue staffing and operating the Legislative Liaison Committee.

Due to time, no report from the *Court Reporter* or *District Conference Rules* Committees was given.

It was reported that Judges Bluemel, Snyder, and Lavery have conferred and would continue working on retention and maintenance of conference records as has been done by the secretary. With the implementation of the docket review process, the Docket Review Committee will consider and develop a policy for retention of records within that committee.

The conference members were reminded that one of the purposes of the conference is to support members of the District Court Bench. To provide that support, if there is something that is not working for an individual judge, that judge is encouraged to contact an officer of the conference (Judges Forgey, Rogers, and Bluemel), a representative on the Wyoming Judicial Council (Judges Wilking, Rogers, and Bluemel), or a JBI representative (Judges Wilking and Condor) for assistance and support.

New Business

Status of New Judge in the 6th Judicial District: It was reported that the new courtroom project in Gillette was put out for bid. No bids were submitted. The judges in the district have met with the County Commissioners who are working with the judges, and all are trying to make changes so they can get bidders. It was reported that the project has great support from the Campbell County Commission, and they are working toward and hoping to have an additional courtroom by July 2024.

There was a report and update on treatment courts.

Good of the Order

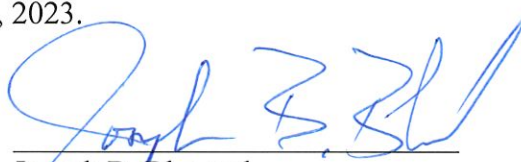
Members present then addressed the Good of the Order.

Future meeting dates were announced: The Fall meeting will be held in conjunction with the Wyoming State Bar and Judicial Conference in Laramie beginning on September 5th. The Winter meeting will be held in Casper, December 7 and 8. Tentatively, that meeting will begin at 1 p.m. the 7th and run until about noon on the 8th. The Spring meeting will be held in Jackson April 25th starting at 8 a.m. and continuing through the 26th.

Adjournment

The meeting was then adjourned.

Submitted this 25th day of August, 2023.



Joseph B. Bluemel
Secretary/Treasurer