



INSIDE

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TRIBAL JUDGE WORKED TO PASS NEW LAW

William Johnson fought for fairer legal landscape

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

MISSION — Twenty-five years ago, Judge William Johnson was troubled that judgments made in tribal courts weren't always upheld off reservation.

If a judge in one of the nine federally recognized Indian tribes in Oregon granted a restraining order, required child support or suspended someone's driver's license, the defendant could escape the order by simply moving off the reservation into another jurisdiction. To be protected, domestic violence victims needed to stay on the reservation or get another restraining order in a state circuit court.

Johnson, now in his fourth 10-year term as chief justice for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, spent a quarter-century trying to change this. His efforts came to fruition this year when Oregon legislators passed Senate Bill 183, which extends full faith and credit to judgments, decrees and orders to all federally recognized Indian tribes.

Johnson, appearing remotely from his office, testified to the Senate Judiciary Committee in March. The judge, who said "Good morning" in Cayuse and introduced himself as Grey Wolf, explained the situation.

"The reality is that tribal geographic jurisdiction is often very small, and it is easy for a person to simply move and never return in order to avoid enforcement of a tribal court order," Johnson told the senators. "The lack of full faith and credit of tribal court orders undermines tribal sovereignty by stripping tribes of the real-world ability to enforce many court orders. This needs to be remedied."

All senators present voted "aye," and House Judiciary Committee members later followed suit. In June, Gov. Kate Brown signed the bill that becomes law Saturday, Jan. 1.

Oregon State Bar takes notice

The moment was a sweet one for Johnson. The law's passage attracted the notice of Oregon State Bar President David Wade, who unexpectedly telephoned Johnson one afternoon. Johnson picked up the



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

Judge William Johnson poses in the rotunda of the Nixyaawii Governance Center on Dec. 14, 2021, near the courtroom where he presides for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

phone with trepidation.

"I thought I was in trouble with the Oregon State Bar," Johnson recalled.

Wade quickly allayed his fears. He told Johnson he had decided to bestow on him "The President's Special Award of Appreciation," a discretionary award not presented every year.

"I said I'd be glad to accept, but it wasn't just me," Johnson said.

During the online award ceremony in October, Wade described Johnson in glowing terms.



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

Judge David Gallaher, left, swears in Judge William Johnson during a ceremony Dec. 4, 2019, at the Nixyaawii Governance Center in Mission.

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SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH

District timetable comes into focus

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — If all goes according to the school board's plan, the Pendleton School District could know its next superintendent by early April.

In the wake of Superintendent Chris Fritsch's retirement announcement in November, the Pendleton School Board held a special meeting Thursday, Dec. 23, to meet with its consultants and set a timeline for the search to come. After the meeting ended, the board issued a press release with a detailed hiring timetable for the district's next chief executive.

On Jan. 4, the district will open the superintendent position to applicants and open a public survey to solicit opinions on the superintendent search. The district's job ad won't close until March 4 but the search will start to accelerate shortly after that.

The board will hold preliminary interviews March 29 and 30 and then interview finalists April 4-6. Immediately following the end of the final round of interviews, the board expects to name Fritsch's successor on April 7. The new superintendent is slated to start July 1, the beginning of the district's fiscal year.

At its Dec. 13 meeting, the board hired Northwest Leadership Partners, a consulting firm of former superintendents with experience in Oregon and Washington. The two consultants working directly with the district — Sergio Hernandez and Bill Jordan — both reside in Walla Walla, their proximity to Pendleton touted by Board Chair Lynn Lieual-len in the press release.

At the meeting, Lieual-len said keeping the public engaged in the process was important because community members already have approached her to express their interest in news on the superintendent search.

"There has been great interest in the process," she said. "More so than last time."

Hernandez warned the board that 20-30 applications for an open superintendent position used to be the norm, but districts have been seeing less during recent searches. He attributed the trend to the uncertainty created by the coronavirus pandemic and a tense political environment that's led to conflict at the school board level.

"People are hunkering down instead of wanting to move," he said.

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Social workers aid Hermiston students

Trio meets with youngsters, seeks solutions to issues

By ERICK PETERSON
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Omar Medina is the longest-serving social worker for the Hermiston School District. He took the job in February 2020.

Since then, the district hired two more social workers — Sydney Moore for the elementary schools and Josefina Smith for the middle schools — all thanks to the Student Success Act, a bill the 2019 Oregon Legis-

lature created to provide additional funds for Oregon schools.

Hermiston School District Superintendent Tricia Mooney said the social workers provide a higher level of service than school counselors, holding sessions with students who need extra help. This help, Mooney said, even could involve crisis situations.

The social workers' presence at the schools is especially necessary these days, Mooney said, because many students are having difficulty transitioning from at-home studies to in-person classes.

Medina, Moore and

Smith in a recent interview at Hermiston High School said the value they bring to Hermiston schools is especially high right now as these days are particularly stressful for students.

Medina has a master's degree in social work from George Fox University, he said, and prior to taking the position of social worker he was a graduation coach at the high school. The jobs share some similarities, he said, as both positions involve one-on-one meetings with high school students. Nowadays, though, he does more mental health work.



Erick Peterson/East Oregonian

Hermiston School District social workers Sydney Moore, left, Omar Medina and Josefina Smith discuss their work at Hermiston High School on Dec. 15, 2021. The district hired the three starting with Medina in 2020.

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