

Judge

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Cramer said it was an awesome experience to work with his father, and the firm usually had three or four attorneys. When Cramer's father started to consider retirement, there was a need for another circuit court judge in the Eastern Oregon area.

At this time, Harney County was part of Malheur County's judicial district, and Grant County was with Baker County.

"Everybody sort of recognized that there was a need for another judge, and different people were advocating for an additional judge," Cramer said. "I know I advocated for forming a new judicial district, but I really think credit should go to Sen. Gene Timms who helped create the 24th Judicial District."

Grant and Harney counties comprised the new district, and Cramer was elected the first judge.

"I hadn't really thought about being a judge, and it wasn't a lifelong thing that I just always wanted to be a judge, but I was encouraged to run," Cramer said. "The more I thought about it, it seemed like a way to serve the public."

Making tough decisions

Cramer knew the types of cases he would work on and knew that the position required making many decisions. He talked to other judges about ensuring he made the right decisions.

"I think I had a good sense of what it would take to make decisions, but I think I am a certain personality where certain cases are hard to let go because you really don't feel there's a great decision to make and you are struggling to make the best decision in a difficult circumstance," Cramer



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

Grant County Judge Scott Myers and Circuit Court Judge William D. Cramer Jr. talk to each other at Cramer's retirement party on Jan. 2.

said. "A lot of judges told me, 'Look, you're going to be making 35 decisions a day, and you're going to get better at it, and you are going to be able to make those decisions.'"

Cramer quickly learned there was more to the administrative aspect of running a court than he originally thought. Fortunately, Cramer said he had a superb trial court administrator, Tammy Wheeler, who does most of the necessary day-to-day administration in the court.

However, as the only circuit court judge in the 24th district, he served on all statutory committees, which most districts usually delegate out among multiple judges available. He is also on call 24/7 to do search warrants, protective orders and other after-hours responsibilities. Cramer also has two offices that he is trying to keep open in the two counties.

"There's been a slow process of going down to Salem and being involved in all kinds of statewide committees to try to advocate for, not just my district, but Eastern Oregon in general," Cramer said. "I've served on the Court Reengineering and Efficiencies

Workgroup committee that required me to travel and be a part of the group, but it was pretty important and it did lead to an increase of staff, which was necessary."

Cramer said the National Center for State Courts conducted a study on case loads in the state.

"They found out that I was the second-busiest judicial district in the state, depending on the year," Cramer said. "Now we are not quite as busy, so we are now pretty much full time for a judge, but even though I am not quite as busy as I used to be, I still feel busy because of the travel between the two counties."

Technological shifts

Technology has helped Cramer fulfill his goal of being present in both counties.

"It's always been important for me to be here (in Grant County) as much as I can, and we do have excellent video conferencing available," Cramer said. "We were one of the first courts to get video conferencing, and we got it long before any urban areas did. I give credit to Judge (Frank) Yraguen of Malheur County who got that initiated, but then we really

followed through and have sort of been the example for the state in some of those areas."

Cramer said, for long hearings, he is less inclined to use video conferencing because, if witnesses are called, seeing them in person helps him observe their body language and have a sense by what's going on in the courtroom.

He said video conferencing saves taxpayers travel costs when handling events such as arraignments and sentencing.

"Grant County deserves to be represented just as diligently as Harney County, and I have family that live here, and that was a commitment I made that I would be here and be the judge for Grant County," Cramer said.

Impactful experiences

A family coming back together in a healthier way than what caused them to appear in court is an incredibly gratifying experience for Cramer to witness, but he said this is rare because the situation is usually pretty bad once it reaches court. Adoption ceremonies, when done right, are also powerful for Cramer.

"It does not happen a lot, but I have seen victims give forgiveness in a very powerful way in the courtroom," Cramer said. "I know it's got me to the point to where I can hardly speak when I watch them giving grace to a person that does not deserve it. It lets me know they are going to move past it in a positive way, and it promotes healing."

Now that Cramer is retired, he is thankful the community gave him a chance to serve, and he never took their trust lightly. Cramer expressed great appreciation for his staff.

"I just really appreciate the positive atmosphere they provide and the desire they have to do the best job for the public, and also a special thanks to Tammy Wheeler," Cramer said.

Cramer now carries the responsibilities of a senior judge, which means he can be sent throughout the state for temporary assignments. Cramer also plans to travel to visit his grandchildren in the U.S. and several that are in Spain, and he plans to see more of this country and its national parks. In time, Cramer plans to get involved with the community but not immediately following retirement.

Cramer's last day as an elected official was Dec. 31, but for now, Cramer will continue his work as judge in Grant and Harney counties until a decision is made about the vacancy or when a new judge is elected.

"To the extent that there's people of faith, they should be praying for the next judge that comes in because they'll have the same concerns that I do of never having enough information and really trying to make the best decision," Cramer said. "Give them some grace to make adjustments and to learn and to move forward on the job."

Climate

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and the majority party to refer cap and trade to the people."

Despite a slew of modifications to the climate change program, which was initially proposed last year, Republicans say that Democrats refuse to accept their amendments. They now insist the plan be put before Oregon voters.

Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, said in a statement Tuesday his first priority is to represent his constituents in Salem.

"The voters have spoken — they have strongly and consistently opposed this cap and trade policy and I stand by them without question," he said.

In the House, one Republican did show up Tuesday morning: Rep. Cheri Helt, R-Bend, a self-described moderate.

In a statement, Helt said she wanted to vote for "common ground climate legislation" and would stay behind "in hopes we can dig deeper, try harder and reach further to find a policy that works for all Oregonians."

"I believe in moderate, bipartisan policy making, as do the people I serve in Bend," Helt said. "The current cap and trade plan ... isn't balanced: going too far in raising the cost of living for working families while doing little for our environment. I am a no vote. Sadly, partisan polarization has pushed the Capitol to this moment once again."

House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, said in a written statement that she had "routinely reached out to Republicans in a genuine effort to hear their ideas and compromise where we can."

"My door is always open," Kotek said. "For now, they have chosen to walk off the job. We may disagree on policy, but one thing is for sure — we can't reach consensus if the Republicans don't show up for work."

Although Democrats have lamented that walkouts represent a breakdown of the legislative process, Drazen lobbied the same criticism back at them, saying they "have not had an interest in respecting the legislative process and have repeatedly refused to compromise."

"Each and every amendment we offered on cap and trade in committee has been rejected," Drazen said in a statement. "I had remained optimistic up until yesterday that a compromise could be reached. Unfortunately, our attempts to achieve a bipartisan consensus that would take into account the views of all Oregonians were denied."

Oregon Capital Bureau's Sam Sities and the Blue Mountain Eagle contributed reporting.

Water

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"It was always known there was going to be a regulatory mechanism, but there was always a desire that this is not always a top-down directed program, but also a little bit from the bottom-up as well, and I question whether or not that has been lost," he said.

On March 5 private landowners will have their opportunity to learn more about the program and share their thoughts and concerns.

ODA Strategic Implementation Area Program Lead Brenda Sanchez will be the guest speaker at the Grant Soil and Water Conservation District annual meeting at 6 p.m. March 5 at the Grant County Municipal Airport.

Sanchez said one good thing about the program is that ODA is on a long-term schedule with the SIAs, which is being implemented statewide.

"We're in all areas of the state, and we are here to tell ag's story," Sanchez said.

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