

## Morrow County DA takes job at Department of Justice



Elizabeth Ballard

**Elizabeth Ballard will join the Medicaid Fraud Unit, which is a national leader in combating health care fraud**

Oregon Attorney General John Kroger Tuesday announced the hiring of Morrow County District Attorney Elizabeth Ballard to prosecute health care fraud for the Oregon Department of Justice.

"As a district attorney, Elizabeth Ballard

brings unparalleled experience and judgment to our team," said Attorney General Kroger. "We are honored she chose to join the Department of Justice."

Ballard, a 2002 graduate of the University of Oregon School of Law, is an experienced prosecu-

tor who has handled a wide range of cases from property crime to aggravated murder. A prosecutor since 2002, she was elected Morrow County District Attorney in 2006. She starts working for the Oregon Department of Justice Medicaid Fraud Unit in March.

"It's been a great honor to serve the citizens of Morrow County as district attorney," Ballard said. "I am looking forward to working for all the citizens of Oregon."

The Oregon Department of Justice is a national leader in the fight

against health care fraud. Since Attorney General Kroger took office in January, 2009, the Department of Justice has recovered nearly \$20 million from pharmaceutical companies that defrauded Oregon consumers and the state Medicaid program.

## Cutsforth files for Morrow Co. district attorney

Tom Cutsforth, who was born and raised in Morrow County but now lives in Mayville, has filled to run for district attorney in Morrow County, his campaign announced this week.



Tom Cutsforth

Cutsforth, who was raised on the family farm nine miles northeast of Lexington, graduated from Heppner High School in 1972 then received his BS degree from Oregon State University in 1976 and his law degree from the University of Oregon in 1988.

According to a press release from his campaign, Cutsforth spent 1988 to 2008 as a career prosecutor in the Lane, Union, Wheeler, Hood

River, Morrow, Gilliam, Baker, Grant and Wasco counties. The release said he prosecuted "over 1800 defendants, completed over 300 jury trials (without assistance), over 2000 cases and two murder cases."

Cutsforth was recalled from the Wheeler County DA job in July, 2008, after residents became angry about his backing of a secure residential treatment facility near Fossil. The proposed facility, similar to the one recently constructed in Heppner, divided the community in a bitter fight and was never completed. Cutsforth lost the recall 335-to-296.

Cutsforth had registered Dec. 4, 2009, to run for district attorney in Gilliam County, and then on February 8 withdrew that filing and the same day filed to run in the Morrow County election.

He told the Gazette that he did this when he heard the incumbent DA, Elizabeth Ballard, would not be running for re-election (see story page 1). "My primary reason was when I heard the DA in Morrow County would not be running again," Cutsforth said it is hard to run against a sitting District Attorney and he did not want to do that. He also said that he knows many people in Morrow County and thinks he can do some good things here. He is currently self employed in a private law practice.

The news release also mentioned numerous civic and professional organizations Cutsforth has belonged to or participated in.

## Nelson to run for DA

Life-long Morrow County resident and current Umatilla County Deputy District

Attorney Justin Nelson is seeking the office of Morrow County District At-



Justin Nelson

orney in this year's May 18, 2010, primary election. Nelson filed for the position with the Oregon Secretary of State's Office on October 20, 2009.

Nelson was born and raised on his family's farm near Lexington and attended Heppner High School. After graduating from Heppner High School, he attended Oregon State University where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in agricultural business management and a minor in natural resource environmental law and policy. Nelson received his law degree and graduated with honors from Willamette University College of Law, Salem, where he was also a member of the Willamette Law Review. Besides his employment as a Umatilla County Deputy District Attorney, Nelson also currently serves Morrow County as a Morrow County Planning Commissioner. During his time as a Umatilla County Deputy District Attorney, Nelson has successfully tried numerous criminal matters, felony and misdemeanors alike in the Umatilla County Circuit Court.

Nelson is married to Andrea Nelson who is seventh and eighth grade teacher at Heppner Junior/Senior High School.

According to a news release from his campaign Nelson is supported in his candidacy by Umatilla County District Attorney Dean Gushwa, and others in the legal and law enforcement sector. Gushwa, who has direct knowledge of Nelson's abilities, states that "Justin Nelson has the experience necessary to become Morrow County District Attorney. He has been in this race since October of 2009 and has been working to build the necessary experience for district attorney his entire career," the news release stated.

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