

# Organizers 'impressed' by forum attendees: District court judge

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By Cameron Probert  
Herald staff writer | 0 comments

MOSES LAKE - Candidates for Grant County District Court judge talked about their experience and plans for the position.

Challenger Patrick Earl told the crowd he wanted to become district court judge because it is the next step in his career. He has worked as an attorney in Grant County for 18 years, he said.

"I have always done district court," Earl said. "I have always been an attorney in district court, every day, every week, throughout the whole time."

He knows the court well, he said, adding he knows the people coming into the court.

"I've talked with them. I've counseled them. I've been part of their lives," he said. "I have many that call me and talk to me about many things."

Along with his time in district court, he has also worked in juvenile and superior court, he said.

"It's time for me to change and further my career," he said. "It's time to push myself. I'm getting a little bit easy as I go through court, after 18 years of going to court. I am excited about serving. I am excited about meeting people."

The experience of campaigning at different community events and the Grant County Fair has been great, Earl said.

"It's great to be a part of this community," he said.

Incumbent Richard Fitterer said the court handles all the misdemeanor cases in the county, including crimes with punishments up to a year in jail, and civil cases up to \$70,000.

"Last year there was almost 32,000 new filings in court. However, we're still considered the people's court, even though each of the judges has about 1,000 hearings a month," he said. "Revenues last year were a little over \$4 million."

A little more than half of the court's revenue goes to the state, and after the expenses of the court about \$500,000 goes into the county's general fund, Fitterer said, adding this totalled to \$4.5 million in the last decade.

He went on to talk about the jail. Fitterer said some jail is mandated by the Legislature, but it's often expensive and often there's no room.

"The jail ends up taking the more serious offenders and trivializes the lesser offenders," he said. "To alleviate that problem, we, as much as possible, use the Department of Corrections work crew or community service."

He pointed out the top crime in Washington is driving while a license is suspended in the third degree.

"To try and resolve those issues, we have a relicensing program," he said.

Both candidates were asked how much experience they had with jury trials.

Fitterer said he hears at least one or two jury trials a month as a judge, estimating about 750.

Earl answered he didn't have an exact number, saying he participated in many district court jury trials, and five or six superior court trials.