

Election 2016

Yakima County Superior Court

[Judge faces challenge from Sunnyside attorney](#)

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Running for his second term on the Yakima County Superior Court, Judge Doug Federspiel is the only one of eight colleagues facing a challenger in this year's election.

He's facing Alex Newhouse, a former public defender who has a law office in Sunnyside.



[Meet the Candidate: Alex Newhouse](#)

Age: 36

Newhouse contends his experience as a public defender in criminal cases and as attorney in private practice providing pro bono services offers a stronger background for a judgeship than Federspiel's experience with the law firm of Velikanje, Moore and Shore, and later as a corporate attorney with the Wilkinson Corp., a Yakima-based real estate investment firm, where he worked prior to becoming a District Court judge in 2010.

"I am running because I think I can do a better job," Newhouse said.

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[Meet the Candidate: Doug Federspiel](#)

Age: 53

But Federspiel said he has practiced a variety of law, including criminal and business, and argued cases in Washington and other states, as well as in federal courts. He said he's also handled family law cases for indigent clients for free during his time as an attorney.

Given the small size of Yakima County's court system, Federspiel said judges need such broad experience to be effective. Unlike larger courts, judges do not have the luxury of specializing in criminal, family or civil law.

"On any given day, we can have a variety of (legal) issues come in before us," Federspiel said. One day he had to go straight from formalizing a divorce decree to handing down a sentence in a criminal case.

The Yakima County Bar Association, in a poll of its members, rated Federspiel above Newhouse in nine out of 10 categories, including judicial temperament. The only area where Newhouse edged out Federspiel was in knowledge and experience with criminal law.

One area where the court needs to improve, Newhouse said, is efficiency. He said people who come to court for a hearing may have to wait hours to see a judge at the morning hearings in criminal court.

To fix that, Newhouse said he would push for a second judge to handle hearings for arraignments, pleas and other matters that involve dozens of defendants and can take up to three hours to get through.

Also, Newhouse would like to see the court fully embrace electronic filing, a move he's already done at his own law office to improve efficiency by making filing and sending documents easier.

The state Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals already use electronic document filing, as do the courts in Chelan, King and Pierce counties.

Valerie Knott, executive assistant to Yakima County Clerk Janelle Riddle, said the clerk's office is hoping to set up an electronic court-filing system. But she said it would require judges to change local court rules to make its use mandatory.

Federspiel also supports electronic filing, noting that it is the standard in federal courts. But he said the most important hurdle to clear is the cost, as it would require an investment in new equipment.

"In an ideal world, it would be great," Federspiel said. "But I'm not aware of any cost-benefit analysis of it."

Federspiel said the court could use some more qualified language interpreters for people coming in to court for hearings or other services. That would improve efficiency, especially if people do not have to wait for an interpreter, as well as ensuring that everyone has equal access to justice, Federspiel said.

Video: "Judge Doug Federspiel and Alex Newhouse on election issues"

http://www.yakimaherald.com/news/elections/2016/superiorcourt/judge-faces-challenge-from-sunnyside-attorney/article_72508780-7c5d-11e6-802b-cf8a37998955.html

There's an ongoing dispute between County Clerk Janelle Riddle and court judges over a variety of subjects, ranging from implementation of a case management system to allowing deputy clerks to serve as courtroom staff, a move Riddle said violated the separation of powers between her office and the court.

A blue-ribbon panel appointed to examine the problems recommended that judges enforce the existing court agreements regarding clerks, and said that Riddle could be found in contempt if she does not comply.

Federspiel said he would defer to the Superior Court's executive committee for how to handle the situation. The committee, which serves as the court's governing body, consists of Judges David Elofson, Richard Bartheld and Gayle Harthcock.

Newhouse, while stressing he doesn't agree with Riddle's position that having her staff work in court was a conflict, said much of the controversy could have been avoided if

both sides had sat down earlier and tried to work out their differences in a less-hostile way. But with relationship between Riddle and the judiciary strained, Newhouse said the blue-ribbon panel was an appropriate response to the situation.

In February, the court implemented a pretrial program, in which low-risk offenders are released with supervision while awaiting trial. The program was in response to a 2012 report that found defendants were spending too much time in jail awaiting trial.

Newhouse said that from what he can see, the program appears to be working, and he would support its continuance as long as it is preserving public safety.

Federspiel said the program, spearheaded by Bartheld and Prosecuting Attorney Joe Brusic, has been successful. He said the program is meeting or exceeding benchmarks for its progress, as well as tracking results.

Both men also said they believe that juries in Yakima County have been, for the most part, representative of the area's diverse population, which U.S. Census data shows is about 45 percent Hispanic. Federspiel said a lot of a jury's makeup sometimes depends on the random selection of people - culled from driver license and state ID card holders and registered voters - to the initial pool of candidates, which sometimes does not yield a fully representative panel of 12 people.

A further safeguard is the fact that judges and attorneys have the right to challenge any attempt to exclude people from a jury panel based on their ethnicity or other characteristic.

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