

'Strong compass': Newly appointed Superior Court judge to put best foot forward



Judge Tyson Hill at the Grant County District Court on Tuesday.
Sam Fletcher/Columbia Basin Herald

by Angelica Relente, Herald Legislative Writer
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Tyson Hill can still clearly visualize the time he experienced an epiphany in law school.

“The first class I had was criminal law. I got my criminal law case book ... opened it up, and within a page I was hooked,” Hill said. “I realized I absolutely was fascinated by the law ... which kind of directed me to the path I’ve taken here in Grant County.”

Hill has been serving as a judge at the Grant County District Court since 2013. Previously, he was a deputy prosecutor at the Grant County Prosecutor’s Office. After he graduated law school, he did clerk work for the Washington State Supreme Court.

Gov. Jay Inslee appointed Hill to the Grant County Superior Court on Thursday to replace Judge John Antosz, whose last day was Friday. Hill will be sworn in on April 23 and will start his first day as a superior court judge April 26.

Hill was born and raised in Eugene, Oregon. He obtained his undergraduate degree from Brigham Young University in 2004, and his law degree from the University of Washington in 2008.

Brian Williams, a longtime friend of Hill and prosecuting attorney in Jerome, Idaho, said he met Hill when they both lived in the same dorm during their freshman year at BYU. That same year, Hill instigated a flag football team.

“(Hill) started as a quarterback and ended as a slot receiver,” Williams said. “He was (a) fellow receiver with me, and we had lots of glory on the flag football field for sure.”

Williams said Hill is a “deep thinker.” Hill naturally accepts people for who they are and is a “human being that thinks and feels for the benefit of others,” he said.

“Tyson is fair and he has a compassion for people,” Williams said. “He’s got a very strong compass towards fairness and not just from a justice standpoint but from a sense of humanity.”

Grant County Prosecutor Garth Dano said Hill is well-qualified to serve as a superior court judge because of past achievements he can bring to the table, like working as a clerk for Justice Jim Johnson of the state Supreme Court.

Dano said Grant County needs a judge who is thoughtful and does not make snap decisions based on their agenda or political views. The county needs a judge who can interpret the law and also have empathy for people, he said.

“(Hill’s) integrity, his judgment and how he conducts the courtroom are ... very well-suited to what we need in superior court,” Dano said.

Former Judge John Antosz said he got to know Hill’s skills as a deputy prosecutor through time, so he expects Hill will perform at a “high level” with integrity and honesty as a superior court judge.

“(Hill is) an excellent choice,” Antosz said.

Hill and his wife conversed about another career path he would take if he was not working in law. He said he would want to be a counselor for those who may be going through personal struggles.

“In some extent you get to do that here from the bench (by) trying to help people who are in the system get out of the system (and) try to improve their lives so they don’t have to keep going through this,” Hill said.

With Hill's recent appointment to the county superior court, he said he wants to make sure people feel heard and his decisions will be based not on personal preferences, but on his understanding of the law.

"I think the people in Grant County deserve a judge who really cares (and) who really does the best they can," Hill said. "That's what I plan to bring to the superior court."