

Title: **Governor, Supreme Court justices welcome Judge Simpson to bench**
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BY CJ BAKER
 Tribune Editor

With his decades of experience and success as an attorney, new District Court Judge Bill Simpson is something of a rarity on the bench, a fellow attorney said last week.

"It's become rarer and rarer that we have real lawyers go onto the bench, because it's a sacrifice — and real lawyers don't want to give up their practice," Richard Honaker, who serves on the state's Judicial Nominating Commission.

At a formal robing ceremony last week, Honaker and other speakers thanked Simpson for his willingness to step up and serve as a judge.

"I can say that he's a darn good lawyer and there's happiness in this room today because I think his appointment as a judge is going to be very well received — and already is," Honaker said.

Simpson took office at the start of August, being sworn in at a small ceremony attended only by family. In contrast, the

Sept. 6 robing packed the district courtroom in Cody, with all five Wyoming Supreme Court justices, Gov. Matt Mead and Secretary of State Ed Murray on hand.

Mead, who appointed Simpson to the judgeship in June,

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'I'm so happy that we have somebody who is a people's lawyer, someone who has represented all walks of life ...'

Bobbi Overfield, Thermopolis attorney

Simpson: Took office at the beginning of August

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praised his "tremendous volunteer work" as an attorney — saying Simpson went above and beyond what attorneys normally do in his 33 years in private practice in Cody.

"You have a goodness about you," Mead told Simpson. "It's a goodness that will serve you well on the bench."

Thermopolis attorney Bobbi Overfield, representing the Wyoming State Bar, described Simpson as warm and comfortable — able to make people feel like they're the most important person in the world. Overfield said that will be a great asset as a judge.

Simpson is also unique among the state's judges in that he has an extensive background as a public defender, representing people who've been charged with crimes and can't afford a lawyer on their own.

"I'm so happy that we have somebody who is a people's lawyer, someone who has represented all walks of life — from the most downtrodden

criminal defendant out there, which nobody wants to help or defend, but [who] you know deserves justice and deserves just as much of opportunity to have representation as anyone else," said Overfield.

In his remarks, which included many thank you's, Simpson said he's made many mistakes in his life — and has been blessed to have people willing to give him a second chance. That realization, he said, drew him to work as a public defender.

"Because I thought, what would happen if somebody had not given me that second chance?" Simpson mused. "I would have been a different person, and I would have been a bad person."

"And I always relish the thought ... to see someone that is deemed irreparable or not salvageable and watch them change and develop and become a productive and wonderful human being," he said.

Simpson pledged to work as hard as he can to "get it right" and talked of the difficulty of his new position.

"You think maybe as a lawyer you would have some grasp and some concept of it, but you really don't," Simpson said of the emotion involved. "Because on the bench sometimes your mind begins to wander and you're thinking, 'Oh my gosh, this is this person's life, their future, I've got to do the right thing,' and yet sometimes you don't know what the right thing is."

Simpson said that's why he's fortunate to have the assistance of great local attorneys who can help him craft good solutions.

Justice Michael Davis spoke of the tough decisions the judge will face in working to maintain the rule of law and living up to the trust placed in him — while dealing with poverty, abuse, addiction, mental illness, revenge and "sometimes just plain old downright meanness."

"It can be very tough to keep a fresh perspective when

you see the same problems everyday: in criminal cases, domestic cases, child abuse

cases, etc. And sometimes your success rate is not all you'd like it to be in solving those problems," Davis said. But he warned not to become hardened.

Later contrasting the role with attorneys, who argue for one side or the other, "the good part about a judge's job is that your job is to get it right," Davis said. "Your job is to find the right solution — that balance that we will call justice."

While there were sober reflections on the justice system, in keeping with Simpson's personality, there was also plenty of levity.

Overfield joked that, if Simpson hadn't turned out to be such a skilled lawyer, she thought he'd make "the best car salesman."

"If he talks long enough he can literally convince you of anything," Overfield said; in picking Simpson over two other candidates, "I guess that's what happened," Mead quipped.

The governor went on to say that, as he made a final decision, he actually tried to picture himself standing be-

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fore Simpson and considered that I say God bless you and whether the judge would give thank you.” him a fair hearing.

“And always you would,” Mead and other speakers Mead said. “You have goodness, you seek justice and for predecessor, Judge Steven Cranfill, for his service.”



District Court Judge Bill Simpson gives a kiss to his wife, Deb, shortly after she helped him formally don his judge's robe at a Sept. 6 ceremony at the Park County District Courtroom. Tribune photo by CJ Baker