

Wolfgram to face first challenge for bench

Written by BILL SCHANEN IV
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For the first time in his 18 years on the bench, Ozaukee County Circuit Judge Tom Wolfgram will face competition for his seat in an election.

Attorney Joseph Voiland, 39, of the Town of Grafton, has registered to run against the county's senior judge in the April 2 general election.

Voiland, who has practiced law since 2002, said he was motivated in part to run for the bench by Wolfgram's decision to sign the petition seeking the recall of Gov. Scott Walker.

"The reason I'm running is that I believe the people of Ozaukee County should have a conservative choice for circuit court judge," Voiland said. "I firmly believe in the separation of powers between the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government. Judge Wolfgram crossed that line when he signed the recall petition."



Tom Wolfgram



Joseph Voiland

Wolfgram, 60, noted that circuit court judge is a nonpartisan position and said the fact he signed the recall petition has nothing to do with how he administers the law in court.

"It wasn't a political comment," Wolfgram said of his decision to sign the petition.

"I have the greatest respect for the separation of powers. Circuit court judges don't make policy. We relate the facts to the law. I've never attempted to make policy from the bench, and I never will."

Wolfgram has spent nearly his entire legal career in Ozaukee County. After graduating from Marquette University Law School in Milwaukee, he served as an assistant prosecutor and district attorney in the county.

After six years in private practice, Wolfgram was appointed to the bench, a position he was

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elected to in 1995, 2001 and 2007.

In 2008, Wolfgram, who is the county's presiding judge, was named Judge of the Year by the State Bar of Wisconsin.

According to a statement issued by the Bar at the time, Wolfgram "is praised for his patience at giving litigants the opportunity to make a good records and his diligence at setting forth findings of fact as well as conclusions of law that demonstrate an intimate knowledge of the appropriate legal standards and how they interact with the matter presented.

"His peers often look to him for guidance on judicial ethics."

In an interview this week, Wolfgram noted that he has extensive experience in both public and private practice.

"I have literally heard thousands of cases as a circuit court judge and was a DA for 10 years before that," he said. "I fully intend to run on my record as a judge."

Voiland, also a graduate of Marquette University Law School, specializes in financial services litigation with the Milwaukee-based law firm Reinhart Boerner Van Deuren.

He has served as counsel to the State of Wisconsin in litigation regarding the 2011 congressional and legislative redistricting and to Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice David Prosser during the recount of votes cast in the 2011 Supreme Court election. He was also a law clerk to Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Diane Sykes, who is now a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit.

Voiland served as a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy before becoming a lawyer.

"I think it's important that the legislative branch makes the law and the judicial branch enforces the law," he said. "I would be an impartial judge."

Circuit court judges serve six-year terms.