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#### OUR VIEWS

##### **Wickham is best choice for judge**

Thurston County residents are fortunate to have two qualified candidates running for a vacant seat on the Thurston County Superior Court bench.

Chris Wickham and Jim Powers survived a five-person primary earlier this month to advance to the Nov. 2 general election. The winner will fill the judicial position being vacated by respected jurist Daniel J. Berschauer, who is retiring.

Wickham is the better choice.

##### **Powers is a prosecutor**

Powers, 54, has more than 21 years' experience as a deputy prosecuting attorney. He holds a law degree from the University of Washington; a doctorate in political science from Washington State University; and a bachelor's degree and a master's degree from Kent State University.

His professional work is impressive. As a senior deputy prosecuting attorney, he has handled a number of high profile cases, including the sentencing of murderer Mitchell Rupe. Powers has successfully defended all but one of his cases in the Court of Appeals.

Powers finished first in a Thurston County Bar Association preference poll with 75 votes. Wickham finished second with 49.

Powers was chairman of the committee that created Thurston County's Drug Court, which diverts low-level drug offenders to recovery instead of prison and helps lower jail recidivism rates.

Powers deserves substantial credit for that groundbreaking work and for getting the highly successful court off to a great start.

He also deserves credit for his experience in a broad range of criminal prosecutions – from DUI and domestic violence cases to the prosecution of sexual predators and gang members.

##### **Wickham is the top choice**

Where Wickham excels is in his breadth of experience.

While Powers is narrowly focused on criminal law, Wickham, by contrast, has 10 years in the private practice, handling a broad array of issues. More importantly, Wickham has 13 years as a Superior Court commissioner, in essence acting as a judge in family law matters and juvenile court.

Judges are called upon to hear all kinds of civil issues, not just criminal cases. Wickham is a better fit.

Wickham, 58, is assigned to his court commissioner role by the seven Superior Court judges and handles cases assigned by them. In that role, he has worked diligently to improve the court process.

He has, for example, created a family treatment court for parents whose children have been removed from the home. The program is designed to help participants into drug treatment and to improve their family lives. Wickham also began a program that requires divorcing couples to understand the judicial process. As part of that program, couples must enter into mediation as a means of resolving marital issues. Wickham also has instituted programs within his court to ensure more consistency in the handling of domestic violence cases.

Wickham will bring that kind of creative and innovative thinking to the Superior Court bench.

He promises to press his colleagues to specialize in certain aspects of law – just as lawyers practice in specialty areas. He believes Thurston County should adopt similar practices to those of County Superior Court in probate and guardianship cases.

Wickham, who holds a law degree from Hastings College and a bachelor's degree from Cornell University, understands the root causes of criminal activity.

He is a strong advocate for drug and mental health court and believes the county can do more prevention and treatment to reduce jail overcrowding.

Wickham also recognizes the importance of judges being involved in their community and would remain an active member of the West Olympia Rotary and the Thurston County Chamber of Commerce.

In a race with two well-qualified candidates, Chris Wickham deserves voter support because of his breadth of legal experience and his proven, 13-year track record acting in a judicial capacity as a Superior Court Commissioner.