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## **Road To The Bench**

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On April 8, 2010, four women judges representing four different Oregon state courts gathered at Willamette University's Cat Cavern with more than 20 lawyers, law students, and law faculty to discuss the "Road to the Bench." The panel included **Oregon Supreme Court Justice Martha Walters, Oregon Court of Appeals Judge Ellen Rosenblum, Marion County Circuit Court Judge Claudia Burton, and Oregon Tax Court Presiding Magistrate Jill Tanner.** Presiding Magistrate Tanner moderated the panel.

Over the course of the lunch hour, the panelists fielded questions from attendees on a variety of topics pertaining to the process of becoming a judge or justice in Oregon. One topic of discussion concerned appointment to state circuit and appellate courts. The Governor has the authority appoint judges to vacancies in the state courts, and one attendee inquired about the factors that typically influence appointments.

The panelists concurred that Governor Kulongoski has been very interested in creating diversity in the judiciary; he has appointed many women and minority judges through the course of his term. Other forms of diversity may also play a role in future appointments. Justice Walters and Judge Rosenblum agreed that the appellate courts in particular suffer from a lack of geographic diversity; most judges and justices are from the more populated northwestern part of the state. In response to a question about the importance of political connections to the appointment process, Judge Burton noted that, while connections are certainly helpful, it is not necessary to know the Governor personally. A judicial candidate may be appointed based on hard work and a good reputation in the community.

Naturally, attendees also expressed interest in the judicial election process. Oregon judges are elected in non-partisan elections for six-year terms. Newly appointed judges must run for election in the next primary and/or general election. Judge Rosenblum discussed her extensive experience with elections. She has participated as a candidate in state and national bar association elections as well as state elections. She advised would-be judicial candidates to develop a thick skin, but also noted that elections can be fun. When asked about deciding whether and when to run in an election, the panelists agreed that timing is crucial. Few judicial candidates are elected the first time they run, so it is important to think carefully about when to run. Furthermore, while it is important for a judicial candidate to make her name and her interest in the bench widely known, it is not wise to become a person who puts her name on *every* ballot.

Finally, attendees sought advice about when to start thinking about the bench and what steps to take before seeking appointment or election. Justice Walters emphasized the importance of making one's interest in serving on the bench widely known. Judge Rosenblum discussed the importance of getting involved in state and local bar associations as well as the community; individuals should seek leadership positions on committees and governor-appointed advisory boards. Judge Burton added that gaining trial or administrative hearing experience provides excellent preparation for service as a circuit court judge.

At the end of the lunch hour, Judge Rosenblum proposed the formation of mentoring circles for individuals interested in continuing the conversation. If you are interested in this possibility, please contact the Mary Leonard Law Society (MLLS) for more information. Additionally, the "Road to the Bench" handout, including an overview of Oregon courts, an explanation of how to become a state or federal judge or magistrate in Oregon, tips for individuals considering the bench, and wisdom from

judges past and present, is available for download on the MLLS website [www.maryleonardlawsociety.org](http://www.maryleonardlawsociety.org).

