

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with local news and commentary for Thursday, July 9, 2020.

After an expected surge of COVID-19, Jefferson County is holding fast with 41 cases. As of Wednesday 3,548 local residents have been tested with 3,441 testing negative. Eighty six people are awaiting results. Ten of the 41 cases have not yet recovered from the virus. The gender ratio is 51 percent male and 49 percent female.

The Jefferson County Court system will resume jury trials this upcoming Monday, July 13, while implementing new health and safety procedures intended to protect the public against exposure to COVID-19.

The Washington State Supreme Court suspended jury trials early in the coronavirus crisis and lifted that restriction this week. In the meantime, local court officials have taken the time to incorporate processes that limit the exposure risk to jurors.

According to a press release, Jefferson County Courtrooms have been reconfigured to comply with social distancing measures. The bench and clerk area have been fitted with a Plexiglas sneeze guard. A disinfecting fogger will be used in the courtroom at regular intervals along with four air purifiers with a heat component that kills viruses on contact.

As for jury service, many questions asked during the voir dire process now appear on the jury questionnaire sent along with the summons. Jury pools are now limited to 30 people. And the orientation film can be viewed online. Anyone entering the Courthouse is required to wear a mask or face covering. Masks will be provided for potential jurors and regular health screenings will occur.

It's up for grabs whether people are more receptive to jury duty, as there are fewer excuses to dodge this responsibility. Like, what else do you have to do?

Election season is creeping in, with ballots for the August 4 Washington State Primary to be mailed to voters next week.

The ballot lists a variety of races, from Governor to precinct committee officer, but the contests are only relevant if more than two people are running for a particular office. After the primary, the two top vote getters will advance to the November 3 general election.

The gubernatorial race has the most candidates, with 35 people filing to run against Jay Inslee in his bid for a third term. Eleven people are seeking the Lieutenant Governorship, left vacant by the retirement of incumbent Cyrus Habib. And three people are challenging incumbent Secretary of State Kim Wyman in her bid for a third term.

In our congressional race, incumbent Derek Kilmer seeks a fifth term, for which he has five opponents.

In the legislature, state representatives Steve Tharinger and Mike Chapman each face primary challenges. Tharinger has three opponents while Chapman has two. Republican Jodi Wilke, defeated by Chapman in 2018, is now challenging Tharinger.

On the county level, District 1 Commissioner Kate Dean drew no opposition and will earn a second term by acclamation. Three district two candidates – Amanda Rae Funaro, Heidi Eisenhour and Lorna Smith – seek to replace David Sullivan, who is retiring after four terms. And while Funaro, Eisenhour and Smith have blanketed the entire county with campaign signs, only district 2 voters will narrow the field.

While there now exists a nationwide controversy over vote by mail, it's a big yawn for us here in Washington where it has been in effect since 2005. Here, we are waiting for the rest of the county to wake up, catch up, and just vote.

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