

Regarding Shane Vannatta

“Shane Vannatta is ruining the reputation of attorneys everywhere”

Let me explain.

I don't write many recommendation letters. And I never do it in a “standard” way. That's why I am going to share 2 short stories to make my point.

I've know Shane for just over 5 years. The only context in which I knew him for years, was Tae Kwon Do. He was often my instructor and occasionally my sparring partner. As a senior level black belt, there are certain qualities a person should live and exhibit. Like respect for those that have a higher rank. And he does...

But on one occasion, the owner of the school wanted to honor Shane and his commitment by awarding him a black belt rank advancement, to a Master rank. This would be similar to someone receiving an honorary degree from a university due to their contribution in a field.

Normally, to advance in rank, a person has to train for months, mastering techniques and skills, then test for hours - a mentally and physically gruelling test - and only if they pass the most rigorous standards, they are awarded a belt rank. Most people would be thrilled if they could skip the hard work and still get the prize.

But Shane Vannatta isn't most people.

Even when offered a rank advancement, he refused to accept it and the title of Master that came with it, until he had done the work to genuinely earn it. <Integrity>

Actions speak louder than words. Right?

Allow me to share one more story.

Only once in the past few years have I needed legal counsel. I contacted Shane for advice, and then retained him for my small issue. He and his team spelled out exactly what the rates and costs would be for their time. And clearly stated that it might take more time than anticipated, if something unexpected came up.

I know you would never guess, but something unexpected came up. And an issue that looked simple on the surface, was rather complex. At the resolution, the actual costs were near double the original 'estimate.'



(This is where I say Shane is ruining the reputation of attorneys)

When I received the final bill, knowing full well it was more than originally anticipated, that bill was accompanied by a short note stating that the invoice was being discounted to more closely reflect the original estimation of time.

I was shocked. Deeply grateful, but shocked. When I asked Shane about this, he simply said that he believed it to be right.

How many attorneys do exactly what they believe to be right, at the expense of their income? Not enough to sway the tide of "Lawyer Jokes." But now, I have stopped telling those jokes, because they don't reflect the character of a man like Shane.

I believe that a judge should be a man or woman of honor and integrity, that acts based on what is right within the rule of law.

That is why I am willing to sign my name, honor and support of Shane Vannatta.

Thanks for your time.



2/18/15

Sid Graef

Director - Salmon Lake Leadership Camp  
Business owner, community partner  
406-552-5997



# Parker, Heitz & Cosgrove, PLLC

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

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February 2, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Re: *Shane Vannatta Judicial Nomination*

Dear Ms. Menzies:

I write to let you know what I know about Shane Vannatta. He wants to be a judge, and clear thinking people should want the same thing. I do not want to suggest how you folks should discharge your responsibility to pick a judge. I do not have all the information you have, either about Mr. Vannatta or the other candidates.

Here is what I know about Mr. Vannatta.

Our paths crossed while serving as members of the State Board of Trustees several years ago. He was in the leadership queue well ahead of me. When the time came for me to become president, Mr. Vannatta became a trusted member of the short list of Bar members I could rely on for consultations which would remain, forever, confidential. He earned this confidence, and here is how.

My first memory of Mr. Vannatta was at a meeting many years ago where, although I barely knew him, I found myself advocating a position in stark opposition to a State Bar proposal in which he had invested a good deal of time and personal energy. A tie vote meant his proposal failed. He spent not a second pouting or doubting my motives. He took it on faith that those opposed to him did it on good faith and seemed to set out to understand how well-meaning colleagues could look at the matter differently than him. This evidences a maturity of thought, and a healthiness of ego necessary in a judge.

He is smart, but you do not need this letter to tell you that.

Judicial Nomination Commission  
Page 2  
February 2, 2015

Anymore, however, the question about judges is – will they be able to handle the workload? Every judge in this state, especially the bigger cities, has the workload of almost two judges. Although the Chief Justice has been doing a good job of bringing some matrix of discipline to our district courts, keeping current on a calendar is still up to the district judge. How do we judge that important trait at this point? He is how I do it.

In those instances where there are few or no exogenous forces on Mr. Vannatta which would bring pressure on him to get his work done, Mr. Vannatta has in each instance done the job thoroughly and timely. He took on and faithfully performed a long list of duties for the State Bar and subsequently the ABA which he largely imposed on himself.

Many years ago, a Supreme Court judge was quizzing me, (lightly, but still quizzing me), about a judge here in Billings. He remarked that the Montana Supreme Court saw a disproportionately small number of appeals out of a certain judge's court and was curious as to why. I observed, on the basis of little study, that the judge could and did make hard decisions and was not a "try to please everybody, thus irritate everybody" type. However, when the judge ruled either orally or in writing, the decision was usually very quick, but always thoughtful. There was a judicious theme about the ruling which let the litigant know he or she had been heard; that the judge did not ignore the unpersuasive position; but with appropriate temperament rejected it.

My strong belief is that Mr. Vannatta will be this type of judge.

In this assessment I have made every effort to remain objective, although over the years he has become a friend in addition to a colleague.

Very truly yours,



Mark D. Parker

MDP/drs

cc: Mr. Shane Vannatta

James J. Hogan  
901 S. Higgins Ave #301  
Missoula, MT 59801

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Greetings,

My name is James J. Hogan (Father Jim Hogan). I am an ordained Catholic priest of the diocese of Helena (Montana) for nearly 54 years. I have served as pastor in six Catholic parishes here in Western Montana. I currently am in Senior Status and reside in Missoula, MT.

I am writing this letter at the request of on behalf of Shane A. Vannatta. I understand he is a candidate to replace Ed McLean in the position of Judge of the 4th Judicial District.

When he enrolled as a first year student at the University of Montana I was the pastor of Christ the King Parish. I met Shane almost immediately in his first year. Then in his years as an undergraduate and later as a law student he was very actively involved in both Catholic Campus Ministry and life as a member of Christ the King parish.

At one point he was elected as a student representative to the Parish Council. The majority of Council members were older, permanent Missoula residents. I think it is important to note that he eventually was elected to serve as chairperson of that Council. In that capacity he was an official delegate to the only Diocesan Synod during my ordained life.

I consider Shane a good friend. Our communication has been consistent during his years of practice as an attorney here in Missoula. There are many things I can say about him as a candidate for the bench. The following is a summary.

PERSONAL LIFE:

Shane is a Montana native. He is very open-minded, courteous and tactful. I know he handles personal stress with patience and always maintains his composure while respecting others. I think he welcomes scrutiny and evaluation and is able to handle criticism without becoming defensive. He was always a very good student and I think continues to be.

He is a responsible citizen and been part of various civic groups on both the local level here in Missoula and in the state. He has never engaged in public behavior that causes scandal and to the best of my knowledge is financially stable. I know he has never shown any inclination to abuse or become addicted to alcohol or illegal substances.

His personal integrity is beyond question. He is a very kind and compassionate person. He is a good listener and a competent speaker. I value the fact that he appreciates the time of others. He is persistent but balanced in his life and work responsibilities. I think he enjoys a good reputation in Missoula and broader.

PROFESSIONAL LIFE:

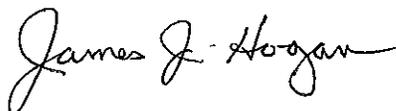
In my opinion, all of Shane's positive personal qualities and characteristics are exactly what is needed in those entrusted with serving as judges.

During his time as the President of the Montana Bar Association he demonstrated his desire to communicate with his peers in a manner that was respectful and challenging. He was able to share his own professional and personal ideals with them in a manner that was non-judgmental and inspirational.

I am certain he is conscious of how judicial decisions affect human beings. I think he will be very compassionate as a judge. I know he will listen to and consider what is said on all sides of a debatable proposition. At the same time he is well versed in civil law and will diligently respect and apply the law in a manner that is fair, honest and just.

I am writing this letter of recommendation because I am sincerely convinced that Shane is an outstanding candidate for this position. If I can be of any additional help please contact me by telephone (406-721-5090) or email ([jim@fatherhogan.com](mailto:jim@fatherhogan.com)).

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James J. Hogan". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

James J. Hogan  
(Father Jim Hogan)

I am sending this by both slow mail and email.



Public Schools, Public Service

February 27, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Letter in Support of Shane A. Vannatta 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Judgeship

Hello,

It is with pleasure I write this letter in support of Mr. Shane Vannatta for the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Judgeship.

I've worked with Mr. Vannatta for the last fifteen years on opposite sides of the table in a variety of labor issues in Eastern Montana. As has been my habit over the course of my twenty-six year career with the MEA-MFT as a labor representative, I believe it is beneficial to foster more positive relationships with those public employers with whom I often work. Creating such relationships is impossible when counsel for the opposing side are more interested in billable hours and chalking up wins rather than creating long-term, sustainable and positive working relationships. Luckily for Montana's public employers, MEA-MFT members, and me, Mr. Vannatta saw the value of creating those working relationships and rather than scoring points, worked with public employers and union members through some of the toughest issues facing all working folks. His work not only enhanced the working relationships in a variety of public employee settings, it went farther—impacting the communities in which the public employers are located.

In my opinion Mr. Vannatta already masters those characteristics a judge *should* master—a legal whip smart, with the ability to work with a number of different individuals, often with diverse backgrounds and on opposite sides to reach common sense solutions and do it while laboring under trying and difficult circumstances.

I fully support Mr. Vannatta and would be happy to comment further if you would like to contact me.

Sincerely,

Maggie Copeland  
MEA-MFT Field Consultant

- Public Schools ■ Higher Education
- State, County, Municipal Employees
- Head Start ■ Health Care

Working for Montana's Future

East Office P O Box 1008, Glendive, MT 59330-1008 ■

TEL 406.365.4015 or 800.398.0841 FAX 406.365.4022 www.mea-mft.org

L. RANDALL BISHOP  
JOHN HEENAN



GENE R. JARUSSI  
*Of Counsel*

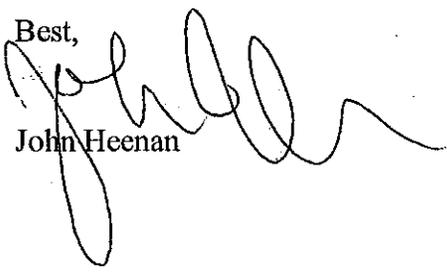
February 27, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Commissioners:

I am an attorney in Billings, Montana with a statewide practice representing consumers. As a law student at the University of Montana, I had the privilege of interning for Shane Vannatta for two years. Shane taught me not just the tools of being a good lawyer, but, more importantly, how to practice law ethically and treat people in a way that reflects positively on the legal profession. Since that time, I have had the pleasure of interacting with Shane at State Bar functions. He is someone who is universally regarded by the Montana bar as highly intelligent, highly ethical, and an overall great person to be around. I can say without qualification that he would be a wonderful judge, and would urge the Commission to consider Shane for the open seat.

Best,

  
John Heenan

*[Faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.]*

# TURNAGE MERCER & WALL, PLLP

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J. A. Turnage  
John A. Mercer  
Chuck Wall

*Attorneys at Law*

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February 24, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

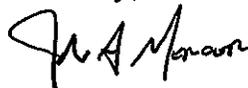
Re: Fourth Judicial District

Greetings,

It is my understanding Mr. Shane Vannatta has submitted his name to your Commission asking that you place his name on the list to the Governor for consideration. I have known, observed and worked with Mr. Vannatta for many years. He is without question one of the finest legal minds in Montana, with an excellent work ethic as well as a thoughtful and even temperament.

You would do a great service to our State by forwarding his name along to the Governor. Shane is everything anyone would want in a competent and efficient Judge.

Sincerely,



John A. Mercer



February 17, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005  
MTsupremecourt@mt.gov

Re: Letter of support for Shane Vannatta's judgeship application

Dear Sirs and Madams,

I write this letter of support for Shane Vannatta's application for the judgeship in the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District for Montana.

Shane Vannatta and I met in September 2014 as part of the Leadership Montana class of 2015. I have had the opportunity to get to know Shane on a personal and professional level. He has many qualities that will serve him well as a judge. He is always professional, open minded, smart, level headed, and consistent. Shane is good at bringing people together to find common ground. He is very organized and disciplined in his approach to work and life. These are the attributes and skills that convince me that Mr. Shane Vannatta will be an excellent judge.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter of support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Judy Preston'.

Judy Preston  
Owner, Skill Builders, LLC  
judy@skill-builders.org

February 18, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, Montana 59620-3005

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in support of Shane Vannatta's application for the judicial position being vacated by the Honorable Ed McLean in the Fourth Judicial District, Missoula County.

I have known Shane for the better part of three decades. We are law school classmates, graduating in 1993. However, I knew Shane before law school. We were both at the University of Montana at the same time, and both majoring in political science. My earliest impressions of Shane were positive ones. He was energized about public policy, and seemed like someone who was deeply concerned about the impact of the law on the individual.

I came to know Shane even better in law school. Shane was one of the individuals who really stood out in our class. It was apparent that he was not just becoming a lawyer to earn a paycheck. He genuinely cared. Equally important, he demonstrated himself to be intelligent, articulate and respectful.

In the two decades since law school, I have had numerous opportunities to interact with Shane on a professional level. It was quite clear that the same characteristics that first impressed me remained with him in the practice. Whenever we opposed one another (or were co-aligned in a matter), Shane proved to be a fine attorney. He was intelligent, cordial and paid attention to details. Perhaps most important of all-- he continuously sought a just result. Shane was not someone to just accept a client's check and run through a retainer. Rather, he sought a just and fair outcome for his client and, where possible, his opponent's client. It is for this very reason that I have felt comfortable referring cases to Shane when I had the opportunity over the years.

The lawyer that must fill Judge McLean's position has some big shoes to fill. Judge McLean was fair, decisive and knowledgeable. These qualities are essential in a judge. I can say with great confidence that Shane possesses these qualities.

Lastly, I will mention that Shane also has great relationships among a broad range of lawyers within the Western Montana Bar. All too often, judges may be good at understanding the law, but forget what it was like to be a lawyer or to bear the weight of a client's problems. I can say with confidence that Shane will remain connected with what it means to be a lawyer and to the challenges faced by clients. These skills would allow him to be efficient in the process of being a judge, and to reduce the cost of litigation to those who find themselves embroiled in legal cases.

Judicial Nomination Commission  
February 18, 2015  
Page 2

Shane would make a fine judge, and I hope he will receive your strongest consideration.

Very sincerely,

REEP, BELL, LAIRD & SIMPSON, P.C.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert T. Bell', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robert T. Bell  
RTB/mp

02/20/2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrators  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Mrs. Menzies,

It has been my pleasure to spend the last six months participating in the 2015 Leadership Montana class with Judicial District court applicant, Mr. Shane Vannatta. In the short amount of time I have spent with Mr. Vannatta, he has quickly shown himself to be an intelligent, outgoing, fair, and tremendous contributor to the greater good of society and Montana. Leadership Montana pushes its class participants to reexamine life through a strangers lens and as a result, we find ourselves in challenging circumstances and uncomfortable conversations while tackling some of the greatest obstacles that face Montana. Not only does Mr. Vannatta stand out as a leader of our class of 44 Montana professionals, but he also leads by example and demonstrates how to be respectful, listen, thoughtfully engage in differing perspectives, and show empathy. Not only is Mr. Vannatta one of the most intelligent people I have ever had the pleasure of getting to know, he is one of the most sincere human's I have ever met.

Over the last few months, the passion that Mr. Vannatta has for his profession as an attorney in Montana and partner at Worden Thane P.C. oozes from him like smoke out of a chimney. Finding passion and a love for your job is something that I have always strived for and hoped to achieve someday. It is clear to me that Mr. Vannatta is doing what he loves while making a positive difference in the lives of the clients he serves. I am confident this passion and desire to help the greater good will only be compounded if selected as the next judge for the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court.

As a proud resident and fourth generation Montanan, Mr. Vannatta embodies all aspects of what it takes to be a steward of the judiciary system as well as a leader in not only the community he serves but also across the state. I respectfully submit my full support for the application of Mr. Shane Vannatta for the vacant 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court for Missoula and Mineral County.

Sincerely,



Chelsea M. Pelc  
406.240.4807

2/20/15

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena MT 59620-3005

Re: Support of application for Shane Vannatta to the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District

Dear Judicial Nomination Committee,

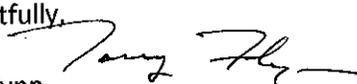
It is with great honor that I write you in support of the recent application of Shane Vannatta, for the soon-to-be vacated judgeship in the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District for Missoula and Mineral counties.

I have had the privilege of knowing Mr. Vannatta for only relatively short period of time through our participation in the Leadership Montana program. My interactions with him have been nothing but positive and during our time together, I have found Shane to objective, sincere, wise and fair.

I do not live in, nor hope to have a need to be in the court systems, for these counties; however, I feel that the residents of said counties, and the Montana Judicial system overall, would gain a great representative by appointing Mr. Vannatta.

It is with my sincerest hope that as your process continues you appoint Shane to the position.

Respectfully,

  
Tony Flynn  
96 Hickory Dr  
Butte MT 59701



**MCDONOUGH COMPANY**

2614 O'Shaughnessy St  
Missoula, MT 59808

T 406-370-1899

Dame McDonough  
[dame@mcdonoughcompany.biz](mailto:dame@mcdonoughcompany.biz)

February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015  
Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator

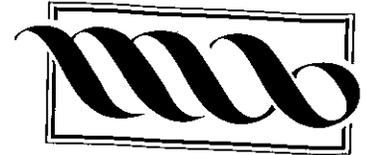
To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in support of Shane Vannatta for the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District in Missoula, MT. I believe Shane will do an outstanding job of representing the people of Missoula & Mineral counties while upholding the laws & liberties of our fine state.

Mr. Vannatta's character, integrity, and balance will of great asset to the courts. An active member of the community, an activist for those who have no voice, and a leader in Montana all highlight that Mr. Vannatta is the right choice for this Judicial District.

Sincerely yours,

Dame McDonough



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ASSOCIATION**

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February 23, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620

Re: Letter of Recommendation in Support of Shane Vannatta's Judicial Appointment

To Whom It May Concern:

I am pleased to provide you with a letter of recommendation in support of Shane Vannatta's judicial appointment. I have had the distinct pleasure of serving in the Leadership Montana Class of 2015 with Shane, not only does he serve as an excellent role model for our class, but he is truly passionate about the State of Montana and its citizens.

In the time I have known Shane, I can tell you he possesses many distinct qualities I feel would make him the ideal candidate for judgeship. Not only do I believe Shane wants to make a difference, I believe he is very purposeful and intent in those efforts. He is sensitive and respectful of all individuals, always demonstrates integrity and honesty, and can be counted on to make good decisions. His willingness to serve his community, his peers, and the State of Montana are positive proof of the difference he wants, and is willing to put in the time, to make.

It is with great confidence I recommend Shane Vannatta. I cannot express enough the value he would bring to the judicial process, the Missoula and Mineral counties, and the State of Montana. He is exactly the type of person I would want sitting in judgment of me, listening to arguments, deciding my fate and applying the law to my situation. I hope you select Shane Vannatta.

Feel free to contact me if you wish to discuss this recommendation in more detail.

Sincerely,

Amy J. Jenks, CIC, CISR  
Vice President of Operations

1 N. Last Chance Gulch  
Helena, MT 59601  
(800) 541-5126  
(406) 443-4121  
(406) 443-7850 fax

February 18, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Commission Members:

I am pleased to support the application of Shane Vannatta for judgeship in the 4th Judicial District (Missoula and Mineral counties). I have known Shane for approximately six months. We are classmates in Leadership Montana, class of 2015. I am the Vice President for Research and Creative Scholarship at the University of Montana and have held similar leadership roles for the past 15 years or so. My support for Shane is not an official university endorsement, I only mention my role to indicate that I have been around numerous leaders in several states for quite a few years. Shane clearly distinguishes himself as a leader among the class. Even in this short time it has become clear that classmates value his opinion on a variety of topics and he has taken leadership in arranging events for our Missoula group outside of the regular events. I cannot speak to Shane's legal expertise or other matters but I do count him as a future leader and friend,



Scott L. Whittenburg

**From:** [Menzies, Lois](#)  
**To:** [Cook, Kevin](#)  
**Subject:** Vanatta -- Public Comment  
**Date:** Tuesday, March 10, 2015 4:01:29 PM

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From: Nancy Condit [<mailto:nancondit@gmail.com>]  
Sent: Wednesday, February 25, 2015 6:08 AM  
To: MT Supreme Court,  
Subject: Shane Vanatta

To whom it may concern,

Please give great consideration to Shane Vanatta for fourth judicial district. I serve on a local board with Shane and find him to be incredibly articulate, able to view subject matter from all angles, well versed in many aspects of law and one of the finest and fairest individuals I know. Shane would be an incredible asset to serve Missoula in this capacity. Consider him your strongest applicant.

Best regards,  
Nancy Condit  
Nancondit@gmail.com  
406-239-6448

Sent from my iPhone

**From:** [Menzies, Lois](#)  
**To:** [Cook, Kevin](#)  
**Subject:** Vannatta -- Public Comment  
**Date:** Tuesday, March 10, 2015 4:00:58 PM

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**From:** Caitlin Copple [mailto:[caitlin.j.copple@gmail.com](mailto:caitlin.j.copple@gmail.com)]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 24, 2015 2:10 PM  
**To:** MT Supreme Court,  
**Subject:** Support for Shane Vannatta

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

I have known Shane Vannatta since moving to Missoula in 2005. I can think of no one better to fill Judge McClean's position than Shane. Shane is very involved in the community through service and philanthropy, and our paths have crossed not only through nonprofit organizations but also through my recent service as a Missoula City Councilwoman.

Shane's credentials as an attorney are impeccable as evidenced by the many publications which have honored him, including: the 2013 Mountain States Super Lawyers for Business Litigation; the 2014 Best Lawyers in America for Commercial Litigation, Copyright Law, Corporate Law, Litigation – Intellectual Property, Litigation – Labor & Employment, Litigation – Real Estate, and Trademark Law. He was also selected as the Best Lawyers 2014 Missoula Litigation - Labor & Employment “Lawyer of the Year.”

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about Shane's qualities for this position.

Best,  
Caitlin

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Caitlin Copple, M.A.  
[caitlin.j.copple@gmail.com](mailto:caitlin.j.copple@gmail.com)  
(406) 493.4281, cell

*\*\*If this is regarding Missoula City Council, please email me at [ccopple@ci.missoula.mt.us](mailto:ccopple@ci.missoula.mt.us). All emails regarding city business become part of the public record.*

**From:** [Menzies, Lois](#)  
**To:** [Cook, Kevin](#)  
**Subject:** Vannatta -- Public Comment  
**Date:** Tuesday, March 10, 2015 4:00:28 PM

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**From:** Bivins, Chad [mailto:chad.bivins@targetbase.com]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 24, 2015 1:04 PM  
**To:** MT Supreme Court,  
**Subject:** Shane Vannatta - 4th Judicial District Judge Applicant

Dear Governor Bullock,

I encourage you to appoint Shane Vannatta to 4th Judicial District Judge. Shane is, without a doubt, one of the best humans I know. He is an amazing lawyer, a great friend, an outstanding family man, and leader in the Missoula community (and all of Montana). I have come across numerous people in my professional and personal life that have also known Shane and said the exact same thing. Aside from his many professional accolades, what makes Shane such a perfect candidate for this role is his personality. He is extremely open-minded, intently listens to people and all sides of the story, and provides advice when needed, without being overbearing. All qualities that we desperately need in a judge and pillar of the community.

Sincerely,

Chad Bivins



Director, Strategic Business Analysis

**CHAD BIVINS**

406.317.1045 [targetbase.com](#)

targetbase

connecting data | applying intelligence | creating experiences

**From:** [Menzies, Lois](#)  
**To:** [Cook, Kevin](#)  
**Subject:** Vannatta -- Public Comment  
**Date:** Tuesday, March 10, 2015 3:59:52 PM

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**From:** Evan Ivaldi [mailto:[evan.ivaldi91@gmail.com](mailto:evan.ivaldi91@gmail.com)]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 24, 2015 12:47 PM  
**To:** MT Supreme Court,  
**Subject:** Judicial Nomination Commission

Greetings!

I wish to publicly offer my support for Shane Vannatta as a qualified and outstanding candidate for the open position within the 4th Judicial District. Mr. Vannatta is a dedicated, hardworking, and respected person of impeccable moral character and has been an asset to Montana's community for many years - and no doubt will continue to be for many years to come.

Since I first met him, I have seen Shane's growth and capacities in both a professional and personal sense. His ability to analytically survey presented issues with both fairness and a critical-eye for detail is an asset that would be invaluable to the available position. His willingness to volunteer both his time and resources for the good of his community, unstoppable work ethic, and positive approach to life are all traits deserving of the highest praise.

I trust the state will fairly evaluate all available candidates and take into account their experience, ethic, and character - and I have every confidence that Shane Vannatta's reputation and history with the state and its courts will display both aptitude and excellence tailored to fill the role of a Montana State District Court Justice.

Kind Regards,

Evan Ivaldi

**From:** [Menzies, Lois](#)  
**To:** [Cook, Kevin](#)  
**Subject:** Vannatta -- Public Comment  
**Date:** Tuesday, March 10, 2015 3:57:18 PM

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**From:** Daniel Bidegaray [mailto:[daniel@bidegaraylawfirm.com](mailto:daniel@bidegaraylawfirm.com)]  
**Sent:** Monday, February 09, 2015 4:50 PM  
**To:** MT Supreme Court,  
**Subject:** Shane Vannatta

Judicial Nomination Commission, I am writing to express my support of Shane Vannatta to fill Judge McLean position. I have known Shane for most of my life. Shane grew up on a farm and ranch outside of Bainville. We were both involved in various activities together, and ultimately were law school class mates. Over the course of my legal career, I have had no hesitation referring clients to Shane because I know he is honest, hard working, and fair. In addition, Shane is bright and has excellent legal skills and experience. Please do not overlook Shane's calm, even tempered personality combined with his Montana background and legal experience. Thank you for considering my recommendation of Shane.

**Daniel B. Bidegaray**  
Bidegaray Law Firm, LLC  
2042 Stadium Drive, Suite 1  
Bozeman, Montana 59715  
[www.bidegaraylawfirm.com](http://www.bidegaraylawfirm.com)



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To:  
Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

From:  
Bradley A. Robinson  
1414 Flowerree St  
Helena, Montana 59601

In reference to:  
Public Comment on Fourth Judicial District Judge Applicant Shane A. Vannatta

February 12, 2015

Members of the Judicial Nomination Commission,

Thank you for soliciting and providing a means for receiving public comment on the applicants for 4th Judicial District Judge. In an age when Government often appears closed and out of reach of the common person, this instance of *vox populi* is a refreshing reminder that we live in a constitutional democracy.

I am writing to make comment concerning applicant Shane A. Vannatta. My experience with Shane has been limited to civil actions therefore I will constrain my comments to this area, however I sincerely believe that his intellect, open-mindedness, and logical approach to the law will be evident in all facets of the District Court case load, whether criminal or civil.

I also believe you have received a lengthy application from Shane recounting his body of relevant work, community service, as well as his awards and accolades. Thus, I will let his exemplary record speak for itself and provide you with a personal explanation of why I believe Shane will make an excellent Judge for the 4th District.

I have known Shane for over twenty years and was one of his first business clients. During this time I have seen innumerable instances of Shane's knowledge. As a result of my personality I have also seen many examples of his patience, understanding, firmness & compassion. When I, along with two co-founders, initially presented a plan for a new business, I worked with the honorable Harry A. Haines (now a Judge of the US Tax Court). After a year of working with Mr. Haines, he began to shift his clients to other attorneys in the firm. Mr. Haines demonstrated his typical brilliance and strategic thinking when he assigned us to Shane Vannatta.

So it is that I met Shane when I was an impatient, enthusiastic, and rather poorly financed entrepreneur who was hoping to start a business in Montana by soliciting

other people's money for the startup. I lacked all but the most rudimentary knowledge of laws pertaining to corporations and had no idea of how to solicit investors and remain in compliance with regulations at each level of Government.

Through many hours of counsel and many hundreds of written communications - both pre-production and once the company was operating - Shane listened patiently, analyzed the information I gave him and responded by guiding me thoughtfully and successfully through many difficult situations and decisions. He helped me gain an understanding of how to make a business a successful venture from a legal standpoint.

Shane's innate resolve and consistent, methodical approach helped Big Sky Brewing Company retain the intellectual property rights to the name of its flagship brand in the face of an international assault by a much larger and more well financed company, and the name of the corporation when challenged by one of the largest breweries in the US. Both of these suits began in the first year of our operations - which was early in Shane's career as well - and both suits were eventually settled in favor of Big Sky.

Now, with the benefit of 2 decades of watching Shane continue a brilliant legal trajectory; with the experience of working directly with him through multiple legal actions ranging from local to international; and having worked with other attorneys since I left Big Sky Brewing Company; I can unequivocally say Shane is an exceptional attorney and he would be an exceptional judge. There is no doubt in my mind that Shane's legal guidance is part of the reason that Big Sky Brewing has successfully navigated the complexities of interstate commerce and become one of the largest and most successful craft breweries in the country.

While it is the case that he will be missed by his clients, Shane's work at the District Court level will benefit society as a whole. This work towards a greater good and commitment to upholding the rule of law is both outstanding for society and a perfect fit for Shane. I believe that a District Judge requires a robust combination of stamina, depth of experience, demonstrated temperament, and sincere humility. Shane has exhibited all of these traits in an ongoing fashion since the first days of his legal career.

I hope you will select Shane Vannatta for this interim appointment: He has long exhibited a wisdom and demeanor that I believe will make him an ideal Judge.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions

Thank you,

Bradley A. Robinson

JEFFREY B. HAYS\*†  
MICHAEL L. HAYES\*  
\*A PROFESSIONAL CORPORATION  
†ALSO LICENSED IN CALIFORNIA

LAW OFFICES OF  
**HAYS & HAYES**  
A PARTNERSHIP INCLUDING PROFESSIONAL CORPORATIONS  
716 SOUTH FIRST STREET  
HAMILTON, MONTANA 59840

TELEPHONE (406) 363-3090  
FAX (406) 363-6777

February 17, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005  
[MTsupremecourt@mt.gov](mailto:MTsupremecourt@mt.gov)

Re: Application of Shane A. Vannatta  
Fourth Judicial District Judgeship

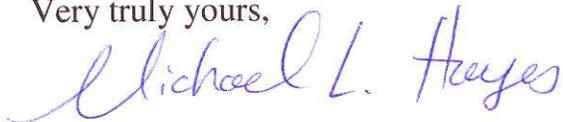
To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to wholeheartedly and enthusiastically recommend Shane Vannatta for appointment to the open judgeship in the Fourth Judicial District Court.

I have practiced general civil law in Hamilton for the past twenty (20) years. Over that period, I have encountered a few attorneys whose professionalism and skill stand out far above the rest. Mr. Vannatta is one of those attorneys. He practices law the way it was meant to be practiced; he is extremely bright, a highly organized thinker, and an excellent writer. He is also diligent, focused, efficient and persuasive. He does all of this with a remarkably professional and polite demeanor, even in cases where he may be an adversary.

I also believe Mr. Vannatta's background in civil law would be a great asset to the bench. I truly hope Mr. Vannatta's application is given the highest possible consideration. While there are many fine lawyers in the state with the skill to be a jurist, it is rare to find someone with Mr. Vannatta's combination of skill and professionalism. If appointed, I know he would bring nothing but the highest repute to the judiciary.

Very truly yours,



Michael L. Hayes

MLH:jmj

February 27, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Commissioners and Governor Bullock,

It is my great pleasure to write this letter in support of appointing Shane A. Vannatta to fill Judge McLean's position in the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District. I regard Mr. Vannatta as an astute lawyer and believe without reservation that he would be an exceptional district court judge.

I have known Shane since he and I served as Resident Assistants together while undergraduate students at the University of Montana. Following law school he served as my personal attorney and several years later I hired him as Chief Legal Counsel for Miles Community College.

In working with Shane in my roles as president of Miles Community College on a number of employment and contract issues, I have been consistently impressed with his ability to communicate intricate legal information and distill complex issues. Mr. Vannatta has the ability to analyze complex material and apply it quickly and effectively. He is thorough and diligent in his deliberations and I have always considered him fair and forthright. His written documents are well-researched and comprehensive, yet easy to understand without excessive jargon or "legalese." Over the years the qualities I have come to appreciate most are his integrity and objectivity.

Mr. Vannatta is a strong candidate for this appointment. His breadth of experience as a private practice attorney as well as his extensive civic involvement have prepared him well. He is a hard-working professional who sets high standards for himself and his clients. In the 30 years I have known him, Shane has always been willing to take on new challenges and has consistently done so with aplomb.

I am convinced he will exceed your highest expectations as a judge and unquestionably recommend him for this position. I would be happy to discuss his qualifications in further detail and offer additional information to assist in your decision. Please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Stefani Gray Hicswa, Ph.D.  
President

Judicial Nomination Commission  
C/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015

To whom it may concern,

I am writing today to encourage support for Shane A. Vannatta to the position of judge for the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court.

I have known Shane for over 14 years both professionally and personally. As a business owner in Montana there are times when legal advice is needed for a number of different reasons. My experience has been one that convinces me he is very qualified to be a judge. In matters that I was seeking legal counsel I found him to be incredibly hard working, extremely thorough and completely objective.

He has always been able to resolve the legal issues I asked him to be involved with and he did so in a highly professional manner. He manages to be very objective and often helps me see both sides of an issue. He never seems to pick a side but instead looks into finding the best solution for everyone.

Shane and I both grew up in small towns in eastern Montana working with farmers and ranchers. While I did not know him until after he had become an attorney I know that he came from humble roots working on the family farm. He worked very hard to become an attorney and eventually a partner in his law firm. We often talk about these humble beginnings and how being a professional in a suit is not much different than being a farm or ranch hand. They both require long hours, extreme dedication and good work ethics. I also know that he understands and cares for people at a very personal level. In the time I have known him he has come out as a gay man, married his partner of 20 plus years and served as the first openly gay President of the Montana State Bar Association. Shane is a motivated natural leader and any relationship with him will most certainly be beneficial.

In closing I can only say that if Shane is appointed to the judgeship position vacated by Judge McLean he will absolutely bring invaluable experience and talent to the job! He is an outstanding citizen and his experience as a private practice attorney will simply add to this appointment.

Respectfully,

Bob MacGrady  
President  
Navigator Direct, Inc  
PO Box 50955  
Billings, MT 59101



**Joseph M. Sullivan**

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February 20, 2015

***Via Email Only***

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
MTsupremecourt@mt.gov

***RE: Letter in Support of Shane A. Vannatta for Appointment as State District Court Judge, 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District (formerly held by Judge McLean)***

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

It is my pleasure and honor to write to you on behalf of Shane A. Vannatta.

Shane and I served for several years as Trustees of the State Bar of Montana. We both moved on to serve on the Executive Committee of the State Bar with both of us servicing as President in successive years. This allowed me to observe Shane's leadership skills, his analytical abilities, and his interpersonal communication expertise.

Shane is highly intelligent with a temperament which combines firmness, understanding, humility, and common sense. While his intellect allows him to assimilate data and apply the law to facts, he communicates his conclusions in such a manner as to address the sensitivities of his audience instilling a trust his decisions are well reasoned and unbiased.

Shane, however, is much more than merely his intellect and temperament. He is a person of the highest character and integrity. He is service oriented and the consummate professional. As fellow members of the Bar's Professionalism Committee, I have seen Shane work tirelessly to provide fellow Bar members with educational presentations to assist them in the professionalism of their practice.

Shane has been an advisor to me, both professionally and personally. From this I understand the respect and concern his clients receive and how members of the public and the Bar will be treated in any courtroom setting.

Finally, through all these opportunities to work with Shane, I am proud to say he is a friend. I do not say that lightly.

---

[jsullivan@sullivanlaw.mt.com](mailto:jsullivan@sullivanlaw.mt.com)

P.O. Box 1766

309 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue North

Great Falls, Montana 59403-1766

Telephone: (406) 761-4583

Admitted to practice in Montana, Oregon, and Washington

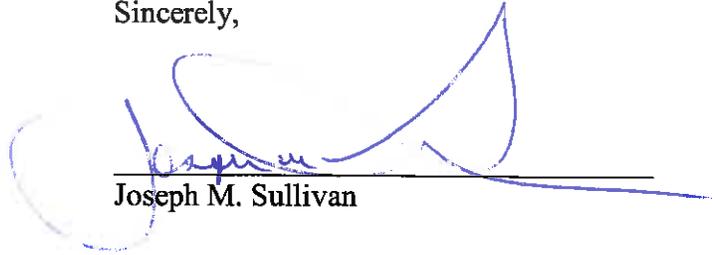


**Joseph M. Sullivan**

---

Accordingly, I cannot recommend highly enough the qualities Shane Vannatta would bring to the Bench. Without question, he would serve the people of the State of Montana with the utmost distinction.

Sincerely,



Joseph M. Sullivan

JMS/klb

Kristen G. Juras, Esq.  
220 Woodland Estates Rd.  
Great Falls, MT 59404  
406 761 7021  
[kristenjuras@gmail.com](mailto:kristenjuras@gmail.com)

February 24, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
Office of the Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620

Transmitted via email [lmenzies@mt.gov](mailto:lmenzies@mt.gov)

Re: Fourth Judicial District – Recommendation on behalf of Shane Vannatta

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission Members:

I write in support of Shane Vannatta's nomination to the judicial vacancy on the Fourth Judicial District Court. As an attorney admitted to the Montana State Bar, I have worked with Shane in a variety of professional capacities over the past several years, primarily in bar-related activities. While I taught at the law school, Shane made several presentations to my classes and student organizations.

Shane is widely known and highly respected by members of the Montana State Bar. I would like to highlight several of Shane's unique and valuable qualities that make him particularly suited to serve as a judge of the Fourth Judicial District (Missoula and Mineral Counties).

(1) Shane brings **more than twenty years of comprehensive legal experience** to the bench, covering a wide range of legal subjects. Shane has worked hard to achieve a reputation as one of the most competent business, transactional, and intellectual property lawyers in the northwestern and mountain states. His excellent legal skills have been acknowledged through his inclusion in listings of the Best Lawyers in America and Mountain States Super Lawyers. However, I believe that the strongest indicator of Shane's competence as a lawyer are the many tributes that he receives from his clients. Each of the clients whom I have referred to Shane have called to thank me for doing so.

(2) As a transactional attorney, Shane practices primarily outside of the courtroom, crafting contracts, structuring and implementing property and business transactions, and otherwise advising clients on their various legal affairs. Although Shane's legal practice is aimed at keeping his clients out of the courtroom, he has nonetheless been involved in significant civil litigation as well as arbitration and other alternative dispute resolution processes. Furthermore, Shane has gained valuable **judicial experience** through his service, since 2004, as a justice of the peace *pro tem* for Missoula County Justice Court.

(3) Shane is **committed to the improvement of the legal profession and access to justice**. He has been actively involved in both the Montana State Bar and American Bar Association, including serving as chairman of the of the Montana State Bar's Professionalism Committee, president of the Montana State Bar, and Montana State Bar delegate to the American Bar Association.

(4) Shane is an **excellent legal writer**. His diverse practice requires a variety of writing skills, including the ability to correctly, concisely, and accurately transcribe his clients' intent into well-drafted contracts, as well as the capacity to write well-researched, well-organized, legally sound, and persuasive briefs and other pleadings. Judges communicate with the public primarily through their written opinions, and Shane's strong writing skills make him a fitting candidate for this vacancy.

(5) Shane is **diligent and an extremely hard worker**. He strives for excellence in all that he does. He manages his time effectively and is able to successfully manage numerous responsibilities. Shane has maintained a demanding and active legal practice while spending hundreds of hours per year in various bar and community activities. He is one of the most productive attorneys I know.

(6) Shane is committed to **the rule of law**. Shane will make judicial decisions based upon the laws enacted through the legislative or citizen-initiative processes, regardless of whether he personally would have voted in favor of such laws or initiatives. Shane will also respect the principle of *stare decisis*. He understands the need for continuity and predictability in the common law, and that changes should occur only after thoughtful consideration and when necessary to address outdated rules or rules that no longer serve the purposes they were originally adopted to address.

In summary, Shane is a very talented, hard-working, and well-respected attorney who has consistently shown commitment not only to his clients, but to the legal profession and the community in which he lives. He is a man of integrity who will interact respectfully with the attorneys and persons appearing before him. I urge you to forward Shane Vannatta's name to Governor Bullock as a qualified candidate for the current vacancy on the Fourth Judicial District Court.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the judicial nomination process, and thank you for your service and your time.

Sincerely,



Kristen G. Juras

# ROBERT J. HABECK

February 18, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Transmitted via email to: [lmenzies@mt.gov](mailto:lmenzies@mt.gov).

Re: Shane Anthony Vannatta

Members of the Judicial Nomination Commission:

This letter serves to support Shane Anthony Vannatta's application for State District Judge in the Fourth Judicial District.

By any evaluation measure, Shane's appointment could be based solely upon his merit. However, looking rationally at the judicial selection method, I see an individual who can preserve the independence of the judiciary, while balancing the need to represent the varied interests of society.

I know Shane through the Leadership Montana program and understand his work through the eyes of a local elected official, but more importantly, I know Shane as a mature, fully-functioning human being. If appointed to the bench, I know Shane would remain accountable to the electorate and could, when necessary, render correct and potentially controversial decisions.

Shane's most distinguishing characteristic is his ability to balance the needs of society through the application of law while preserving human dignity. His achievement of combining true humanism with law and order is desired by many, but mastered by few. Shane embodies those characteristics requisite of a district judge being fairness, impartiality, and strong integrity.

I strongly recommend Shane for State District Judge and urge the Commission to recommend him to Governor Bullock for appointment.



Robert J. Habeck

*St.* ST. PETER LAW OFFICES, P.C.  
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

2620 RADIO WAY  
P.O. BOX 17255  
MISSOULA, MT 59808  
TELEPHONE: (406) 728-8282  
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March 9, 2015

DON C. ST. PETER, ESQ.  
don@stplawoffices.com  
LINDA OSORIO ST. PETER, ESQ.  
linda@stplawoffices.com  
MICHAEL O'BRIEN, ESQ.  
mike@stplawoffices.com

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Re: Application of Shane A. Vannatta  
4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Judgeship

Dear Members of the Commission:

I write in support of the application of Shane A. Vannatta for the District Court vacancy in the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District.

I have know Mr. Vannatta for his entire legal career either as an intern, an Associate attorney, or as opposing counsel. Mr. Vannatta has demonstrated the highest degree of professional ethics, professional competency and professional courtesy. He would make an outstanding district judge.

Mr. Vannatta first came to my attention when he was hired as an intern with the law firm of Worden, Thane and Haines where I practiced at the time. His performance as an intern so impressed the firm that the decision was made to offer him a position as an associate attorney. While our practices did not overlap, I had frequent contact with Mr. Vannatta.

After I left that firm, Mr. Vannatta and I were opposing counsel in multiple matters involving contested probate issues and commercial transactions. During all of my professional contact with Mr. Vannatta he has proven to have a thorough understanding of the law and has demonstrated a commendable work ethic. His work product shows that he does not cut corners or advance unmerited arguments. He has always maintained the best of professional conduct and courtesy. His prior conduct gives me confidence that as a district judge he would maintain the same high level of competence, hard work and professional decorum.

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
March 9, 2015  
Page 2

Mr. Vannatta's experience covers a broad range of civil law matters. He would come to the bench with a significant background in substantive civil law as well as the Rules of Civil Procedure. He also has significant experience in criminal and domestic matters as a result of his *pro tem* Justice Court work. As a result he has a rounded background in both civil and criminal law matters that is somewhat unique. While attorneys rarely come to the bench with substantive experience in both civil and criminal law, Mr. Vannatta has such a background as well as the work ethic to ensure that he is well versed in the law applicable to the cases that will come before him as a district judge.

While you have received applications from several competent candidates for this vacancy, Mr. Vannatta stands out because of his broad legal background, his high degree of professional ethics; his professional competency; and his demonstrated professional decorum. He would make an outstanding district judge.

I encourage you to advance his application to the Governor for appointment to the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Don C. St. Peter", written in a cursive style.

Don C. St. Peter

DSP/alr



# Montana Taekwondo Association

Scott Alan Becker, Immediate Past President • 74 Airstrip Road • Libby, MT 59923  
406-293-4853 • scott\_karol@yahoo.com

March 4, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Ms. Menzies and Members of the Commission:

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of Shane Vannatta. I'm actually finding it difficult to fully and eloquently express just how *highly* I regard Shane personally, and the work he has done for the Montana Taekwondo Association (MTA) and Montana's martial arts community over the years.

I have known Shane for twenty-five years and count him as a close and trusted friend and someone I can always count on to be honest and forthright. We first met as University of Montana students where we also studied Taekwondo together from 1990 onward. Over the years, during which he and I also worked on many non-profit projects together (including co-organizing seven Montana State Taekwondo Championships), he has consistently displayed the highest levels of character, personal integrity, sensitivity, and humility in everything he does (which I have always admired) while also generously helping many individuals and groups by volunteering his considerable and formidable knowledge of the law to helping them achieve success in their pursuits. I can honestly say that Shane is one of the best people I know, and I could recount many, *many* stories and anecdotes regarding Shane that highlight his outstanding qualities. In the interest of brevity, however, I would like to offer this...

In 2006, the Montana Taekwondo Association, Inc. ("MTA" – a 501(c)(3) organization and the official state association recognized by the US Olympic Committee's National Governing Body or "NGB" for Taekwondo, USA Taekwondo) was in a state of disarray. Personal conflicts had spilled into the organization and it was essentially non-functioning from a member standpoint. Additionally, the organization was largely insolvent with little prospect of resolving the pressing financial issues. The organization was in danger of losing its status with the NGB.

Following a meeting where 22 of the state's Taekwondo leaders banded together to reorganize the MTA, I (as a member of the newly elected board of directors) invited Shane to help set the MTA back on course. In spite of knowing full well the personalities involved and how unsavory the process might (and ultimately did) become, Shane agreed, and over the following years he threw himself not only into the

task of helping “re-imagine” the MTA, but also of educating MTA leadership on how to run a member-focused, non-profit corporation not only from a “legal” standpoint, but morally and ethically as well.

Shane made it possible for the members to engage and direct their organization, and the MTA is now a democratic, member-focused organization with considerable resources, revenues, tools, and programs that serve the needs of thousands of Montana Taekwondo practitioners each year. Among state Taekwondo associations nation-wide, the Montana Taekwondo Association has since gained the reputation of being one of the country’s most progressive, innovative, and successful state associations. It’s not a stretch to say that without Shane’s guidance and contributions, that would have never happened. Shane’s continued leadership and advice have helped ensure that the MTA stays on a path where it can continue to serve Montana’s Taekwondo instructors, students, athletes, coaches, and referees.

I am extremely excited that Shane has this opportunity to apply to become a District Court Judge. At times I find it difficult not to join in the cynicism our society currently has about our elected and appointed leadership; but the idea that Shane might ascend to this position, where I know without a doubt he will make a positive contribution, makes me just a little bit hopeful for the future. I can’t think of anyone better for the job.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott Alan Becker', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Scott Alan Becker

Immediate Past President (January 2015 to Present)  
Montana Taekwondo Association

GEISZLER STEELE, PC  
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

March 12, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Sent via U.S. Mail and via email to [Mtsupremecourt@mt.gov](mailto:Mtsupremecourt@mt.gov)

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

I respectfully ask you to nominate Shane Anthony Vannatta for Montana District Court Judge for the Fourth Judicial District Court of Montana. Mr. Vannatta is extremely well-qualified to be a District Court Judge. Shane possesses and embodies the highest ethical standards and is well respected not only by the attorneys and judges with whom he works, but within the community. Shane's good judgment, equanimity and kind nature make him the most qualified and able to meet the demands placed upon a District Court Judge.

Shane Vannatta is qualified to be District Court judge. Shane is an honors graduate from the University of Montana School of Law. He has more than 20 years of legal experience. During that time, he has maintained a highly-regarded civil practice, and has tirelessly advocated for his clients. Shane is widely regarded as one of the preeminent business and commercial lawyers in Montana. Moreover, Shane has served as a Justice of the Peace *pro tem* for Missoula County Justice Court since 2004 where he has presided over numerous civil and criminal cases. Without reiterating the exceptional qualifications Shane has set forth in his application, I would ask that you carefully consider the *curriculum vitae* Shane submitted with his application; these qualifications alone demonstrate Shane is well qualified to be a District Court Judge.

However, it is not only Shane's broad legal experience and superior intellect which makes him qualified to be a District Court Judge. Shane is also well respected by the attorneys and judges with whom he works. As an attorney who practices primarily in western Montana, I speak with attorneys often, and I am familiar with the reputations of many. Shane's reputation is among the best. When I hear his name mentioned in conversation, the words "diligent," "hard-working," "ethical," "even-tempered" and "kind" are soon to follow. These adjectives would also describe my own experience in working with Shane. I met Shane shortly after graduating from law school,

Judicial Nomination Commission

March 12, 2015

Page 2

and he has graciously and patiently served as a mentor to me since that time. Shane's alacrity, clear thinking and good judgment have helped me resolve legal dilemmas, political dilemmas, and he has inspired me to follow his lead by dedicating a portion of my profession to serving the public good.

As you know, Shane is active within the legal community and serves in various local, state and national bar organizations. He was raised in Montana, and although he has achieved exceptional professional success and recognition, these achievements have not come at the cost of becoming removed from his small-town upbringing. Shane continues to maintain ties with not only attorneys and judges throughout Montana, but with everyday citizens across the State of Montana. His longtime connection to our state, its citizens and its heritage, make him uniquely electable.

Your Commission is charged with selecting individuals qualified to serve our state as a District Court Judge. That position requires such an individual to possess a superior intellect, the highest ethical standards, and sustained equanimity. Shane possesses each of these qualities. He is qualified to serve as a District Court Judge. He is respected by the legal community and the public too. And he can win an election if he is challenged in the future. I respectfully ask that your Commission nominate Shane Anthony Vannatta to serve as District Court Judge for the Fourth Judicial District Court of Montana.

Sincerely,

GEISZLER STEELE, PC



David J. Steele II

DJS:kl

## Cook, Kevin

---

**From:** Menzies, Lois  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 12, 2015 5:43 PM  
**To:** Cook, Kevin  
**Subject:** Vannatta -- Public Comment

**From:** Joe Tralongo [<mailto:jtralongo@bresnan.net>]  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 12, 2015 2:56 PM  
**To:** MT Supreme Court,  
**Subject:** Letter of support for Shane Vannatta

**Judicial Nomination Commission**  
**c/o Lois Menzies**  
**Office of Court Administrator**  
**PO Box 203005**  
**Helena, MT 59620-3005**

Members of the Judicial Nomination Committee  
Honorable Governor Stephen Clark Bullock:

I am writing on behalf of my good friend, Shane Vannatta, regarding his application to fill the seat of retiring Judge Ed McLean.

I have known Shane for nearly 11 years, and I can honestly attest that he embodies all the best qualities of a professional and a friend. I've been around quite a few men and woman of note, beginning with my career in Washington D.C., where I worked for the Honorable Senator Barbara Mikulski of Maryland. From the Senate, I went on to work for the Howard Hughes Medical Institute where, as head the purchasing for the UCSD/Salk Institute satellite office, I found myself surrounded by the brightest minds of our time, all National Academy of Science members, some even Nobel recipients. And, for the last ten years, I have enjoyed my life as a freelance automotive journalist, traveling extensively and meeting many of the industry's most senior executives. I give you this brief history of myself so that you can better understand when I say I've been around many brilliant minds, successful politicians and captains of industry, most of whom I believe are blessed with the same leadership qualities I so admire in Shane Vannatta.

Although I hold all of my colleagues in high regard, I've found many lack something that cannot be taught at a university or acquired in the boardroom; it's called common sense. In Shane, I find an individual as brilliant and perceptive as any of the above mentioned persons, yet with an uncanny ability to weed out the frivolous and emotional without losing his humanity in the decision making process. Shane can apply logic, reason and a common sense with an ease that even I envy, and yet his opinions and ideas never come off as cold calculations pulled from the pages of a dusty old law book. Shane and I often take long walks, discussing politics or the law. Being a bit of a hot head, I often become quite emotional in my arguments, but Shane never raises his voice, never strays from the letter of the law or talks down to me (even when I'm clearly in the wrong). He simply takes in all the facts and lays out a measured, reasoned conclusion that in the end, much to my chagrin, leaves me reconsidering my position. Even after I concede, there are no harsh feelings, no

celebratory finger pointing on his part, he simply remains true to his beliefs while simultaneously proving he can respect my point of view.

I believe this is exactly the type of disposition that makes for a great judge. An ability to see both sides, to try and keep bias at bay and to deliver a judgment that is both fair and yet adheres to the law as written. Perhaps it's the hard work ethic he learned growing up on a farm, or the discipline and fortitude required to put himself through law school, but whatever you call it, Shane has the ability to blend a very Montanan attitude about what is fair and just with an acute understanding of the law and all its complexities. He's also just a genuinely decent human being who I think would make an excellent judge and an excellent representative for the Montana judicial system.

Regards,  
Joseph Paul Tralongo

718 S. Garfield  
Missoula, MT 59801  
619 347 1403

**W. Rick Beck, Esq.  
503 Pattee Canyon Dr.  
Missoula, MT 59803**

March 11, 2015

Lois Menzies  
Judicial Nomination Commission  
Office of Court Administrator  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

**Re: Shane A. Vannatta, Esq. -- Letter of Support**

Dear Ms. Menzies:

I wholeheartedly endorse Shane A. Vannatta for appointment to the District Court Judgeship for the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District in Missoula!

I first met Shane in 1997 while working as a Claims Attorney for Attorneys Liability Protection Society (ALPS) in Missoula. ALPS enjoyed a very positive working relationship with the members of the Worden Law Firm, which ALPS called upon frequently when defending the interests of its insured attorneys. Although Shane's practice did not focus on the defense of professional liability claims, I contacted Shane often and consistently found him to be highly responsive, helpful, and professional. I quickly developed great respect for, and confidence in, Shane's abilities and have never hesitated to refer friends and colleagues to Shane for legal guidance on complex business matters.

In my current position at Providence St. Patrick Hospital, I continue to reach out to Shane as a friend, mentor, and trusted colleague. Shane and the highly respected Worden firm are valued assets to the St. Patrick Hospital ministry, which for many years has relied upon Shane's partners specializing in medical malpractice liability to represent the interests of both St. Pat's and its employed providers. I remain forever grateful to Shane for his willingness to act as my "go to" expert when I need thoughtful, considered advice on issues of employment, property, estate, and business law.

Having grown up in Poplar, Montana -- less than fifty miles from Shane's home town of Bainville -- I fully appreciate Shane's unwavering rural Montana work ethic. Beyond Shane's steadfast commitment to his work, I truly admire his demonstrated ability to listen openly and fairly to all sides of an argument, to maintain an even temperament in challenging situations, and to dedicate countless hours of time and effort toward the advancement of both the Bar and the Missoula community which he has selflessly served as a student, legal intern, Justice *Pro Tem*, and practicing attorney. As a District Court Judge, Shane's strength of character, intelligence, and proven integrity will no doubt serve the citizens of Western Montana for many more years to come!

Respectfully Submitted,



**W. Rick Beck, Esq.**

[William.Beck2@Providence.org](mailto:William.Beck2@Providence.org)

Direct Line: (406) 329-2628

Bruce T. Bender  
365 Kensington  
Missoula, MT 59801

March 12, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

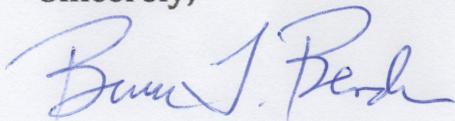
RE: Letter in Support of Appointment to 4th Judicial District Judgeship  
Shane Vannatta

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in support of selecting Shane Vannatta to fill the vacant position of Missoula District Court. I have personally known Shane throughout his career and have professionally worked with Shane in my job as Chief Administrative Officer for the City of Missoula. I have experienced Shane as both a person of integrity and a very competent private attorney.

In his professional work in assisting the City of Missoula, Shane has exhibited not only his competency in law but has been hard working, responsive, thorough and has exhibited a strong sense of concern and fairness for others.

Sincerely,



Bruce T. Bender

March 10, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, Montana 59620-3005

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in support of Shane Vannatta's application for the judicial position being vacated by the Honorable Ed McLean in the Fourth Judicial District, Missoula County.

I have known Shane Vannatta my entire legal career. I have had the good fortune in handling cases both with and against Shane. He practices law the way lawyers should. His legal positions are both well-reasoned and fair. Make no mistake. Shane is a zealous advocate for his clients. However, he understands the importance of the process and exercises fairness in all aspects. Because of Shane's legal abilities and judgment, I routinely refer cases to Shane.

Indeed, Shane's legal acumen and judgment are stellar. However, Shane is an even finer person than he is practitioner. He dedicates countless hours providing *pro bono* legal services to those who cannot afford it. In addition, Shane has served as a dedicated member and officer of Montana State Bar—all because he is committed to making the practice environment better for attorneys and clients, alike. Shane understands the problems that plague our profession (rising legal costs, an overworked judiciary, etc.). As judge, I trust him to actively seek solutions to these problems.

I strongly support Shane's application. Should Shane receive the appointment, you can expect that Shane would work extremely hard to uphold the law and make sure that everyone is treated fairly. That is how Shane practices law, and that is how he lives his life. I sincerely hope that Shane will receive your strongest consideration for this judicial appointment.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions, comments or concerns.

Very sincerely,

REEP, BELL, LAIRD & SIMPSON, P.C.

Cory R. Laird  
CRL/am

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Re: Judicial Appointment

To Whom It May Concern:

I understand that Shane Vannatta has applied for appointment to the judicial position being vacated by Judge Ed McLean. I have worked at the same law firm as Shane for more than twenty years and based on that experience I would like to suggest that you strongly consider Shane for the position.

Shane is an extremely knowledgeable attorney and a very hard working individual. Given the workload of most judges, Shane's work ethic will be valuable in keeping the wheels of justice rolling smoothly. Shane's Montana background places him in a position to be able to relate to the diverse population of this community and his legal knowledge will allow him to apply the law appropriately for all members of the community.

Another asset that Shane would bring to the position is the volunteer public service he has performed throughout the years. This type of unselfish service by a judicial member would reflect well on the judicial system as a whole.

I strongly urge that you add Shane to the list of nominees forwarded to the Governor for his consideration. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Rosemarie Plumb

## Cook, Kevin

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**From:** Menzies, Lois  
**Sent:** Monday, March 16, 2015 3:12 PM  
**To:** Cook, Kevin  
**Subject:** Vannatta - Public Comment

From: Tracy Axelberg [<mailto:taxelberg@mcgalaw.com>]  
Sent: Sunday, March 15, 2015 6:09 PM  
To: Menzies, Lois  
Subject: Shane Vannatta

Hi Lois-

Jolyn Montgomery and I are writing to heartily recommend to you Shane Vannatta for The Honorable Ed McLean's seat in Missoula County. Shane is a friend, a colleague of mine and has represented both of us. He is bright, honest, experienced and a hard worker. Most importantly, he has the temperament and judgment to wear the robe. Please give Shane your serious consideration for this important position.

Best regards-

Tracy Axelberg  
Jolyn Montgomery

Sent from my iPad

LAW OFFICES  
**CORETTE BLACK CARLSON &  
MICKELSON, P.C.**

GREGORY C. BLACK  
ROBERT M. CARLSON  
MARSHAL L. MICKELSON  
C. KATHLEEN McBRIDE  
MARIE KAGIE-SHUTEY  
ANNIE N. HARRIS  
ANGELA K. HASQUET

A PROFESSIONAL CORPORATION

**Mayer Building**  
129 West Park Street, Suite 301  
P.O. Box 509  
Butte, Montana 59703

Telephone (406) 782-5800  
Fax (406) 723-8919

HOWARD A. JOHNSON (1893-1974)  
ROBERT D. CORETTE (1911-1989)  
KENDRICK SMITH (1905-1989)

Of Counsel:  
WILLIAM M. KEBE, JR.

Retired:  
R.D. CORETTE

March 17, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Re: Application of Shane Vannatta (Fourth Judicial District Judge)

Greetings:

I write in support of the appointment of Shane Vannatta to fill Judge McLean's position in the Fourth Judicial District. In my mind, the Commission could not find a more appropriate person to succeed Judge McLean than Shane.

I have had the pleasure to work with Shane primarily through our mutual volunteer work with the State Bar of Montana and the American Bar Association.

Shane first impressed me with his work as a member and later Chair of the Professionalism Committee. His dedication, hard work, and insight into the Rules of Professional Conduct and his ability to translate that knowledge into educating the members of the Bar through the various seminars put on by the committee was truly remarkable. It was clear from the beginning that Shane's leadership skills, knowledge, and hard work would be a tremendous asset to the State Bar of Montana.

It was no surprise that the State Bar members in the Missoula area elected Shane to the Board of Trustees and, after his hard work on the Board, certainly no surprise that he was ultimately chosen by his fellow trustees to chair the Board. He did a great job as Chair of the Board and the next logical step was for him to run for President-Elect of the State Bar. Again, he excelled as both the President-Elect and President. His ability to thoughtfully handle difficult situations facing the Bar and the practice of law and to build consensus among not only the board members but also the members at large of the State Bar was truly remarkable. He has a patient and

unassuming manner but is also confident in his ability to lead. He has a very organized and deliberate method of approaching and solving each problem and hurdle.

It was also obvious to me that Shane was destined to perform on a more national stage. He was appointed by the ABA President to a much sought after position on the ABA Commission on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. He was also elected to be the State Bar of Montana's delegate to the American Bar Association House of Delegates. From my vantage point, as Chair of the ABA House of Delegates from 2012 to 2014, I witnessed firsthand his skill, commitment, and dedication in his service both on the Commission and in the House.

I certainly hope that Shane will be able to join a number of my other friends who are members of the state and federal bench who continue to volunteer their talent and energy to the good work of the various state and local bars and the American Bar Association.

It is also obvious, based on my discussions with people who have worked with Shane over the years in legal matters, that he provides the same type of diligence, hard work, thoroughness, and thoughtfulness in his service to his clients and to the greater good of the legal profession. Shane is somebody who has great practical experience in a wide variety of settings and would bring that commonsense approach to the district court judgeship. Shane recognizes that it is important for district court judges to handle matters not only objectively but also in a timely manner so the cost of litigation is reduced and a person's experience with the judicial system is a good one.

Shane certainly possesses the qualifications we all want in a judge. He possesses the perfect demeanor for a judge. He is even-tempered, competent and fair, and his integrity is without doubt.

In addition to his many hours of volunteer support to the organized Bar, he has also found time to give back to the Missoula community serving in various capacities on the Missoula Chamber Ambassadors and the United Way of Missoula. He also has an excellent relationship with the Law School and is serving as a member of the Board of Visitors.

All of the above adds up to the perfect candidate for this position. There is no doubt in my mind that Shane is qualified to be a district court judge; he would have broad support from the Missoula community; and, certainly, he would run for and be successful in any re-election campaign. He possesses all the qualities required of a good judge.

Judicial Nomination Commission  
March 13, 2015  
Page 3

I strongly encourage you to forward Shane's name to Governor Bullock with your strong recommendation that he be appointed to fill Judge McLean's judgeship position. I would certainly be willing to answer any questions the Commission members might have concerning my experience and knowledge of Shane and his background and qualifications.

Thank you for your service as members of the Commission and for your time and attention.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert M. Carlson". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Robert M. Carlson

RMC/ss

March 14, 2015

Kurt F. Ingold  
6160 Wildcat Road  
Missoula, MT 59802

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Ms. Menzies,

Re: Letter in Support for Shane A. Vanetta for Appointment to fill Judge McLean's Position in the Fourth Judicial District.

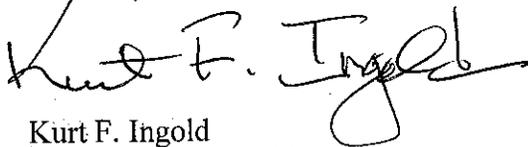
I have been a public practice Certified Public Accountant in Missoula for primarily forty years and have recently retired, remaining active in the Missoula Community. I have known Shane A. Vanetta for the past fifteen years, both professionally and socially as members of the Missoula Rotary Club and Missoula Area Chamber of Commerce.

I believe Shane has the characteristics of an outstanding judge. In my dealings with him, I've found an enthusiastic professional who follows through on projects with attention to detail. He is very well spoken, and speaks and writes clearly, in an orderly fashion. Shane has an objective viewpoint, and regularly presents both sides of an issue in a respectful manner. He is a leader of people, and projects a confident demeanor.

A number of years ago, I recall Shane being honored to have been able to serve as a substitute Missoula Justice of the Peace. He was aware of the responsibility of that position, and appeared comfortable performing the duties of that assignment. When in practice, I frequently referred clients to Shane when they did not have regular counsel.

Should you or the committee have any questions or need addition information, please call or email me at the contact information below.

Sincerely,



Kurt F. Ingold  
406.728.5214

[kingold@montana.com](mailto:kingold@montana.com)

Betsy Brandborg  
3730 Eagle Bay Drive  
Helena, MT 59602  
h: (406) 475-3535  
w: (406) 442-2205

March 18, 2015

The Judicial Nomination Commission  
Attn: Lois Menzies  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Re: Shane Vannatta's Application to Serve the Fourth Judicial District Court

Dear Commissioners:

I write to endorse the selection of Shane Vannatta as a candidate for appointment to the Fourth Judicial District Court.

I have worked with Shane in his capacity as a volunteer for the State Bar of Montana with several different committees, including State Bar leadership, and have known him as a friend. He's solid, he has common sense and he knows how to bring people together to work towards intelligent resolution of an issue with good humor. He knows the law and he communicates well. His legal research and writing skills are exceptional. But where Shane excels is in his ability to provide leadership and thoughtful decisions.

Judges are critical leaders and communicators in their communities. The recent state and national legislative challenges to the judicial branch of government suggests that judges (and of course, bars) could do more to explain their role in making government work for people. People don't always see the law as fair or just and it's important for them to understand how the system works. If they know how the system works, they understand that justice is our society's best effort to find fairness. In my bird's eye view of the state's legal communities, I see greater respect, deference and appreciation of civility and of the justice system in the communities where the judges are fully engaged – speaking at local civic associations and schools and participating (and leading) bar activities. The natural result of full engagement is that the legal system benefits. Clients and attorneys both better appreciate how to disagree without being disagreeable and they respect the process that lead to the result applied to them. If selected, Shane will fill the niche with grace, decorum and humor.

Both preceding and after serving as the State Bar's President, Shane has been and is consistently recruited by the serving President to lead the Board and Bar members on issues that have required special consideration, including long range planning. He is deeply respected as a thoughtful decision-leader.

The public, both clients and their attorneys, would be well served by appointment of Shane to the Fourth Judicial District.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Betsy Brandborg". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping "B" and "B".

Betsy Brandborg



# CITY OF MISSOULA

## *Police Department*

*"Honor, Valor, Pride"*

---

March 19, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, Montana 59620

Dear Commission Members:

I am writing to support the selection of Shane A. Vannatta's application to the Judicial Nomination Committee for referral to the Governor for consideration as a District Court Judge. This appointment is to fill the vacancy created by the retirement of the Honorable District Court Judge Ed McLean in the Fourth Judicial Court.

I have worked with Shane and can attest to his character, even temperament, patience and respect for the rule of law. He has a strong work ethic and is decisive, but fair, in his dealings with his clients, the public, as well as others who work with him. I am proud to be a classmate with Shane in this year's class of Leadership Montana. I have learned a great deal about Shane's passion and knowledge of the law and the impact our judicial system has on individual citizens.

Shane has a broad civil background and has demonstrated a desire to improve the judicial system. His experience in justice of the peace *pro tem* with benefit him in the role as a District Court judge. His commitment to the community's needs are reflected through his strong leadership skills including serving as President of the State Bar of Montana and Western Montana Bar Association.

I full support Shane A. Vannatta in his endeavor to be appointed as a District Court Judge in the Fourth Judicial District.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Brady".

Mike Brady  
Chief of Police

March 17, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
C/O Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

RE: 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Candidate, Shane Vannatta

Members of the Judicial Nomination Commission:

I urge you to forward Shane Vannatta's name to Governor Bullock as nominee for the Fourth Judicial District judgeship being vacated by the Honorable Ed McLean. I met Shane twenty five years ago when he was a student of mine during law school at the University of Montana School of Law. I have had extensive contact with him in the two decades he has practiced law in Missoula and as he assumed leadership positions in the Western Montana Bar Association and the State Bar Association of Montana. It has been my pleasure to observe him as he developed into a stellar lawyer and leader in the law in Montana. He has also been a long time friend who I admire and respect.

Based on my experience with Shane, I make the following observations: Shane Vannatta is the consummate professional lawyer. He has a keen intellect, good judgment and meets the highest practice standards. He is diligent and thorough in his work, and highly competent. He has always enjoyed a reputation as an excellent attorney and advocate. He is a man of principles known for his objectivity and integrity and has established an impeccable reputation for ethics.

I think Shane has judicial temperament and judicial demeanor. He is a problem solver who can fairly weigh options and has the decisiveness and discipline to act and implement. He is diplomatic and tactful and likes people. Shane is fair and respectful of other people's ideas and is viewed as a bridge builder in the State Bar. Above all, Shane is fair minded and displays a refreshing humility. Needless to say, he is very popular in this community and would be a highly favored candidate in a judicial election.

Shane Vannatta is qualified in every way for this judgeship, and I am very pleased to recommend that you nominate him to Governor Bullock for the position. Thank you for your consideration of my observations about this excellent candidate.

Sincerely,



Gregory S. Munro  
Interim Dean,  
University of Montana School of Law

2405 Skyline Drive  
Missoula, MT 59802

March 18, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Re: Letter in Support of Shane A. Vannatta, Applicant for Appointment to Fourth  
Judicial District Judgeship

Dear Members of the Judicial Nomination Commission:

I enthusiastically recommend Shane A. Vannatta for appointment to the Fourth Judicial District Judgeship. I had the pleasure of teaching Mr. Vannatta when he was a student at the University of Montana School of Law and subsequently have worked with him for many years on the Professionalism Committee of the State Bar of Montana. Mr. Vannatta has the depth and breadth of legal experience, intellectual prowess, commitment to the rule of law, and personal attributes I consider critical to the work of a state district court judge. Permit me to elaborate.

Mr. Vannatta's legal experience is impressive and distinguishes him as a candidate for the district court judgeship. Since graduating from the University of Montana School of Law in 1993, Mr. Vannatta has engaged in a broad-based civil practice with Worden Thane, a prominent Missoula law firm. For over twenty years, he has represented individuals, non-profit organizations and business entities in matters ranging from estate planning, probate, and real estate transactions to sophisticated commercial, employment, and intellectual property transactions. Apart from his civil practice, Mr. Vannatta, since 2001, has also served as Justice of the Peace *Pro Tem* in Missoula County Justice Court Department II. As a result of his many years of private practice and judicial service, Mr. Vannatta possesses the substantive and procedural knowledge necessary to address effectively the broad range of legal matters that come before the district court. His experience will also enable him to understand the real world implications of the decisions he makes as judge.

Mr. Vannatta has a fine mind. He is quick to understand complex issues and master complex materials. He is articulate, organized, creative, and technologically savvy. Those qualities were apparent in his excellent academic work as a law student and continue to distinguish him in his work as a practicing attorney and State Bar leader. For example, as a member of the State Bar's Professionalism Committee, Mr. Vannatta works closely with other members of the committee to develop and present continuing legal education (CLE) programs for State Bar Annual Meetings

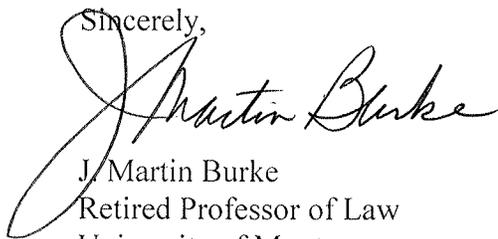
and State Bar Road Shows. In this CLE work, Mr. Vannatta consistently demonstrates a deep understanding of the legal and ethical issues regularly confronted by the practicing bar, an ability to develop thought-provoking hypothetical cases raising those issues, and the skill to engage CLE participants in robust dialogue regarding the appropriate resolution of the hypothetical cases presented.

Mr. Vannatta's commitment to the rule of law is reflected in his exceptional service to the legal profession. Understanding the practice of law to be a public calling, Mr. Vannatta, as noted above, has served for the last fourteen years as a Justice of the Peace *Pro Tem* in Missoula County. Since becoming a member of the Bar, he has also willingly, enthusiastically and ably assumed numerous professional leadership positions which have demanded an enormous amount of his time. He has served as President of the State Bar of Montana, Chair of the Bar's New Lawyers Section, Chair of the State Bar Professionalism Committee, Chair of the State Bar Board of Trustees, and State Bar ABA Delegate. Additionally, Mr. Vannatta has held various offices in the Western Montana Bar Association and currently serves as a member of the Board of Visitors of the University of Montana School of Law. Mr. Vannatta's record of leadership in our profession reflects his passion for the law and clearly distinguishes him as a candidate for the district court judgeship.

Finally, Mr. Vannatta possesses those qualities of character that are the hallmarks of excellent judges. He is fair, honest and diligent. He takes pride in his work and is committed to excellence. He demonstrates good judgment and sound reasoning. He is civic minded and actively works to strengthen his community through his participation in organizations like United Way of Missoula and Leadership Missoula.

In conclusion, Mr. Vannatta's legal experience, intellectual talents, leadership of our profession, commitment to public service, and personal qualities combine to make him a truly exceptional candidate for the Fourth Judicial District Judgeship. I strongly recommend him to you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "J. Martin Burke". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the word "Sincerely,".

J. Martin Burke  
Retired Professor of Law  
University of Montana  
School of Law

2405 Skyline Drive  
Missoula, MT 59802

March 18, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Re: Letter in Support of Shane A. Vannatta, Applicant for Appointment to Fourth  
Judicial District Judgeship

Dear Members of the Judicial Nomination Commission:

I enthusiastically recommend Shane A. Vannatta for appointment to the Fourth Judicial District Judgeship. I had the pleasure of teaching Mr. Vannatta when he was a student at the University of Montana School of Law and subsequently have worked with him for many years on the Professionalism Committee of the State Bar of Montana. Mr. Vannatta has the depth and breadth of legal experience, intellectual prowess, commitment to the rule of law, and personal attributes I consider critical to the work of a state district court judge. Permit me to elaborate.

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Mr. Vannatta has a fine mind. He is quick to understand complex issues and master complex materials. He is articulate, organized, creative, and technologically savvy. Those qualities were apparent in his excellent academic work as a law student and continue to distinguish him in his work as a practicing attorney and State Bar leader. For example, as a member of the State Bar's Professionalism Committee, Mr. Vannatta works closely with other members of the committee to develop and present continuing legal education (CLE) programs for State Bar Annual Meetings

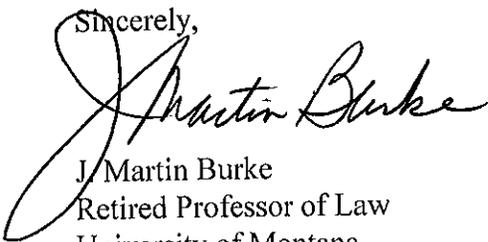
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Finally, Mr. Vannatta possesses those qualities of character that are the hallmarks of excellent judges. He is fair, honest and diligent. He takes pride in his work and is committed to excellence. He demonstrates good judgment and sound reasoning. He is civic minded and actively works to strengthen his community through his participation in organizations like United Way of Missoula and Leadership Missoula.

In conclusion, Mr. Vannatta's legal experience, intellectual talents, leadership of our profession, commitment to public service, and personal qualities combine to make him a truly exceptional candidate for the Fourth Judicial District Judgeship. I strongly recommend him to you.

Sincerely,



J. Martin Burke  
Retired Professor of Law  
University of Montana  
School of Law

James C. Nelson  
Justice, Montana Supreme Court (Ret.)  
841 S. California St.  
Helena, MT 59601  
406-431-2131  
jcnelson44@gmail.com

March 21, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Re: Shane A. Vannatta

Dear Members of the Commission:

It is my honor to urge your favorable consideration of Shane A. Vannatta for the appointment to fill the unexpired term of the Hon. Ed McLean, Fourth Judicial District Judge, upon Judge McLean's retirement.

I have known Shane for many years, both personally and professionally. In both capacities, I know him to be a man of character and uncompromising principles. His application demonstrates his extensive service to his community and to the Bench and Bar of the State of Montana, and there is no need to reiterate that here--except I will note, that, in my opinion, he was one of the best and most successful Presidents of the State Bar of Montana in its history. His leadership, by word, deed, and example is unmatched.

While serving as a Justice on Montana's Supreme Court, I often had occasion to examine Shane's written work product and observe his performance in our Court. I can state without equivocation that Shane is an exceptional attorney—one of Montana's best and most respected. His wide-ranging civil and criminal practice experience, his work ethic, and his temperament have all prepared him for the next logical step in his career—that of District Judge. Indeed, my hope is that at some point he will choose to run for a seat on the Montana Supreme Court or for appointment to the federal bench. Our State needs jurists like Shane—intelligent, hard-working, respected, knowledgeable and experienced.

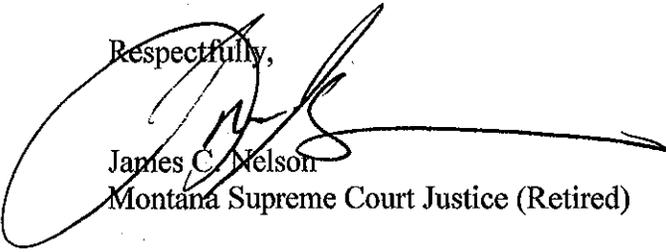
Just as important, Montana needs jurists committed to improving our civil and criminal justice systems. There is more work, and not enough money and resources to go around. Shane demonstrated while serving the State Bar of Montana in various leadership and executive capacities that strong leadership and innovate and visionary thinking can and will improve an institution. His tenure proved that. I believe Shane will bring that same commitment to the State Bench.

I cannot praise Shane enough. He is one of the finest, most experienced and most respected attorneys in the State of Montana. He is one of the Montana Bar's best advocates and leaders at

the State and National levels. He is a man of compassion, integrity and character. I simply cannot think of any person who I would rather see sitting as a District Judge in one of the busiest jurisdictions in our State. Missoula County and Montana need—and deserve--Shane on the bench.

I strongly urge the Commission to recommend Shane to the Governor for appointment. Thank you.

Respectfully,



James C. Nelson  
Montana Supreme Court Justice (Retired)



350 Ryman Street  
P.O. Box 7909  
Missoula, Montana 59807-7909  
(406) 523-2500  
Fax (406) 523-2595  
www.garlington.com

J. C. Garlington  
1908 – 1995

Sherman V. Lohn  
1921 – 2007

R.H. "Ty" Robinson  
(Retired)

Peter J. Arant  
Stephen R. Brown  
Gary B. Chumrau  
Randall J. Colbert  
Justin K. Cole  
Kathleen L. DeSoto  
Scott W. Farago  
Candace C. Fetscher  
Gregory L. Hanson  
Elizabeth L. Hausbeck  
Isaac M. Kantor  
Tessa A. Keller  
Bradley J. Luck  
Robert C. Lukes  
Kathryn S. Mahe  
Alan F. McCormick

Kristina K. McMullin  
Charles E. McNeil  
Mark S. Munro \*  
Robert L. Nowels  
Anita Harper Poe  
Larry E. Riley  
Jeffrey M. Roth  
Susan P. Roy  
Robert E. Sheridan  
Brian J. Smith  
Jeffrey B. Smith  
Peter J. Stokstad  
Christopher B. Swartley  
Kevin A. Twidwell  
William T. Wagner

\*Currently admitted in New York,  
Texas, and Washington only

March 23, 2015

**By email only to: MTsupremecourt@mt.gov**  
Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator

RE: Shane A. Vannatta – Application Fourth Judicial District Judge

Dear Sir or Madam:

We write this letter in support of Attorney Shane Vannatta's , appointment to be the District Court Judge for the Fourth Judicial District Court in Missoula, Montana. I am a partner at Garlington, Lohn & Robinson, PLLP, and have worked on numerous cases with Shane over the course of the last twenty years or so. As we both practice in the area of intellectual property matters, we have been adverse on cases and acting as representatives for co-defendants in litigation both in state and federal courts. Shane is a very astute legal scholar and excellent writer. He is also a strong oral advocate for his clients, as I have participated in numerous hearings with him before the courts. Finally, I know Shane to be of very high ethical character and he has always managed his practice of law with the very highest of ethical considerations in mind.

With these qualifications, I believe Shane would be an excellent district court judge for Missoula County. He possesses all of the qualities that we need in a district court judge. I believe he could easily master the legal complexities involved in the various matters that would be before him, and, also, I believe he would truly be an unbiased and impartial judge. In sum, I support the appointment of Shane Vannatta to the bench in Missoula County and believe he would be a great judge for this district.

Very truly yours,

GARLINGTON, LOHN & ROBINSON, PLLP

Robert C. Lukes

Direct Line: (406) 523-2514

Email: rclukes@garlington.com

RCL:sec

Edward C. Higgins  
421 King Street  
Missoula, MT 59801  
406-240-2922  
Ehiggins1501@gmail.com

March 23, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Via e-mail: [MTsupremecourt@mt.gov](mailto:MTsupremecourt@mt.gov)

RE: Shane A. Vannatta

Members of the Commission:

I would like to share something about Shane Vannatta with the Commission that I think might otherwise go overlooked.

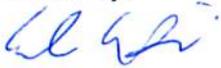
As you may know, the Western Montana Bar Association has one of the most, if not the most, robust and vibrant Pro Bono program in the state of Montana. The WMBA Pro Bono program places cases in Ravalli, Mineral and Missoula counties and currently has over 100 cases placed with volunteer attorneys.

What you would not know, absent this letter, is why that Pro Bono program even exists. It exists because Shane made it happen. Prior to Shane's tenure as President of the WMBA, the Pro Bono program consisted of the immediate past president of the WMBA calling on his or her friends and asking if they would consider taking a Pro Bono case. When Shane finished his term as President of the WMBA, he was not satisfied with the old system. He called together stakeholders from the WMBA, small firms, big firms, and Montana Legal Services Association and created a Pro Bono committee. Shane then served as chair of that committee to create a program that places cases throughout the Fourth Judicial District and holds family law advice clinics. The program that Shane created has now endured into its second decade.

Shane is a force for positive change in his community. Were he to become a judge, I would expect that Shane would not only provide justice for the parties before him, but also work to expand access to justice for everyone in the Fourth Judicial District.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Ed Higgins



**BIG SKY BREWING CO.**

MISSOULA, MONTANA

March 23, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

I am writing this letter in support of Shane Vannatta's application for the 4th Judicial District Appointment. Shane has been Big Sky Brewing Company's attorney since before Big Sky Brewing officially existed. He was involved in crafting our business plan back in 1993 and was instrumental in registering BSBC as a corporation in the state of Montana at that time. In the twenty-two years since then, Shane has been an asset to us in many ways. Big Sky Brewing Company has been involved in numerous trademark disputes – including one that dragged on for seven years – and Shane has been our representative in all of these cases. Due in large part to Shane's diligence and hard work, we have reached satisfactory agreements in all of these disputes. As a small company with a relatively large number of shareholders – over 100 at some points – Shane has been important in making sure Big Sky Brewing Company has a positive relationship with its investors. Shane has written many contracts for BSBC and we always have him double-check contracts that others provide to us. In short, whenever the management team at BSBC has any legal or quasi-legal question, Shane is our first resource.

I have known Shane for over twenty years and have always been impressed by his work ethic and personal ethics. He always responds quickly to my questions and I greatly appreciate his ability to resolve issues in a timely manner. Shane will be an excellent judge as getting at the truth of an issue is one of his bedrock values. He explores all sides of an issue and takes the time to make sure he understands it before rendering a decision. Shane is thoughtful, professional, and respectful in his demeanor, and I believe his presence as a judge will strengthen the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District.

While we will hate to lose Shane as our attorney, we recognize his talents will benefit many more Montanans when he serves as judge of the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District, and for that reason we support Shane Vannatta's application for this position.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Neal Leathers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Neal Leathers, President  
Big Sky Brewing Company

March 23, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P O Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

RE: Support of Shane Vannatta Application for 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District judgeship

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

It is with great pride and pleasure that I have the opportunity to support the application of Shane Vannatta for the open judgeship in the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District. Shane is an excellent candidate for this position because of his extremely sharp and intuitive legal mind combined with his fair and good natured concern for friends, family and clients. He is well known and well liked in this community.

I first got to know Shane thru the Leadership Missoula program. We both served as chairpersons of the program and got to work together in planning and presenting the program for several years. I am proud to say that we have formed a lifelong friendship since that time. We currently serve together on the Missoula Chamber Ambassadors. I also had the need for legal advice and consulted Shane and he proved to be very concerned with my situation and facilitated getting it resolved for me, even though it was not in his regular scope of work.

Shane is a professional, well organized individual who would be a respected judge for the 4<sup>th</sup> district. In working with him, I have learned that Shane has the skills and personality to be a consensus builder and is very good at bringing individuals together. Before writing this letter, I reviewed his application and I think you will agree that Shane meets all of the qualifications for this position and would do an excellent job.

Sincerely,



Robert A. Homer  
439 Blaine ST  
Missoula, MT 59801  
(406) 721-3539

**From:** [Menzies, Lois](#)  
**To:** [Cook, Kevin](#)  
**Subject:** Vannatta -- Public Comment  
**Date:** Monday, March 23, 2015 6:58:31 PM

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**From:** Chad Cole [mailto:chad.cole@mannmortgage.com]  
**Sent:** Monday, March 23, 2015 1:07 PM  
**To:** MT Supreme Court,  
**Subject:** Re: Shane A. Vannatta

**Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator**

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

Please accept this letter of support for Shane A. Vannatta for the Fourth Judicial District. Shane is a friend, client, and confidant who I know to be remarkably dedicated to his profession and community. In both personal and business dealings with Shane I can attest to his integrity and character, which are impeccable. In short, I believe Shane is the perfect candidate and will make an outstanding judge.

Best regards,

**Chad Cole**  
**NMLS# 652244**  
**Branch Manager**  
**Office 406.926.MANN**  
**Cell 406.599.2027**  
**Fax 406.926.6003**  
<https://www.facebook.com/MannMissoula59>



**Mann Mortgage, LLC**  
**TRIED, TRUSTED, PROVEN**

This email is protected by the Electronic Communications Privacy Act, 18 U.S.C. Sec. 2510-2521, and may contain data that is confidential, proprietary or non-public personal information, as that term is defined in the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act (collectively, Confidential Information). The Confidential Information is disclosed conditioned upon your agreement that you will treat it confidentially and in accordance with applicable law, ensure that such data isn't used or disclosed except for the limited purpose for which it's being provided and will notify and cooperate with us regarding any requested or unauthorized disclosure or use of any Confidential Information. By accepting and reviewing the Confidential information, you agree to indemnify us against any losses or expenses, including attorneys' fees that we may incur as a result of any unauthorized use or disclosure of this data due to your acts or omissions. If a party other than the intended recipient receives this e-mail, he or she is requested to instantly notify us of the erroneous delivery and return to us all data so delivered.

**From:** [Menzies, Lois](#)  
**To:** [Cook, Kevin](#)  
**Subject:** Vannatta -- Public Comment  
**Date:** Monday, March 23, 2015 6:57:58 PM

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**From:** Sarah McDougall [mailto:sarahmcdougall2001@gmail.com]  
**Sent:** Sunday, March 22, 2015 12:22 PM  
**To:** MT Supreme Court,  
**Subject:** Judicial Nomination Commission

c/o Lois Menzies

I am writing to support my friend Shane Vanatta, a candidate, to replace the retiring Judge McLean. Shane is an accomplished Attorney who has dedicated 21 years to the profession. I've had the pleasure of knowing him seven years and from day one he has always been friendly, polite, and fun to be around. His lifelong accomplishments demonstrate a strong work ethic and dedication to his community. Any district court would be thrilled to have him serving as their judge, just as I'm honored to be his friend.

Thank you for your time.

Sarah McDougall

**From:** [Menzies, Lois](#)  
**To:** [Cook, Kevin](#)  
**Subject:** Vannatta -- Public Comment  
**Date:** Monday, March 23, 2015 6:57:17 PM

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**From:** Dwight and Sheila Vannatta [mailto:dns vann@nemont.net]  
**Sent:** Friday, March 20, 2015 4:22 PM  
**To:** Ching, Liz  
**Cc:** MT Supreme Court,  
**Subject:** Gov Steve Bullock appt of Shane A Vannatta to fill Ed McLean judgeship

I, Dwight E. Vannatta from Bainville, Mt., not only nominate, but highly recommend and strongly urge you to appoint Shane to fill out the term vacated by Judge Ed McLean.

I will attempt to explain who I am and why I believe so strongly why Shane should be appointed to that position.

First off, being his dad's brother in a family of eleven, I have known Shane since the day (May 5, 1968) he was born.

He was raised on the same farm that I was, so he has actual hands on experience with a wide variety of plants and animals that teach lessons about life and living that most people are never exposed to, much less actually experiencing first hand, and thusly able to draw from a level of parable type of knowledge that would serve, not only as a background knowledge of and understanding problems, but also working knowledge applicable to issues that require fair and equitable decisions no matter the level of intensity and humanity.

His background also includes being raised in a strict and religious family setting, thereby establishing strong morals, a deep sense of the Golden Rule importance of obedience tempered with an open compassion and honest assesment of issues and people.

The old adage, that we each and everyone of us, at any given moment in time, are nothing more than a product of our life's experiences, education and work history gives him insights and observances that are not only suitable, but important for this position.

Generally, people that have had the most difficult hardships, challenging issues, heart wrenching or humiliating experiences are the best equipped with compassion, understanding, and stability to deal with and render fair, balanced, and appropriate decisions for the issue, situation, circumstances, and people involved.

I personally think this is a step in the direction of his aspirations, goals, and my hopes for his success in all his future endeavors.

In order to properly refer, rcommend and nominate Shane for the judgeship, I will identify myself and thusly Shane's quality, qualifications, ability and preparedness for the appointment.

As I previously stated, Shane was raised on the same farm as I was, so I can vouch for his origin and authenticity. I am a high school graduate(1962) including Vo-Ag and Vo-tech plus numerous school related organizations.

I also had one year of mechanical engineering at NDSU before my draft notice.

I have been a student in the school of hard knocks, which includes forty years of operating trains on the Great Northern RR- now the BNSF.

During my earlier years of railroading, I was drafted into the US Army on the 5th of May of 1965. I went from Basic troop training to advanced infantry to jungle warfare, to sniper, to forward observer/sniper, to forward observer/sniper/communications, which led to STRATCOM(Stragiccommunications command) ,Army Security Agency and Communications monitoring, which included all military (foreign and domestic) all Federal(Congressional and Executive) (foreign and domestic).

This ultimately led to upgrading the presidential link between Washington DC and Saigon, VN via Europe and Eurasia. Also involved moving SHAPE, NATO, and SEATO communications from Paris France to Brussels Belgium.

When I was released from the Army in 1967, I helped my(sick)dad on thefarm until my military leave of absence expired and I had to go back to my railroad job.

During my tenure on the railroad I did some farming, then owned and operated a motel and trailer park and RV park. I continued my railroading until 2002, when the BNSF pulled the Enron stunt on me and

devastated my life.

I then convinced a good friend of mine to help me start an organization that we could use to solicit investments, businesses, politicians and others to come together to build and operate an energy complex comprised of a petroleum refinery that would be the nucleus of and totally integrated with an ethanol plant of various types, biodiesel of various types, and supplemented with solar and wind energy of various types.

I apologize for this lengthy letter, but I believe it is very important to establish real credibility, in order to vouch for someone to a position like this.(after many writings I have reduced it to this much!!!)  
for more information contact me

Dwight E Vannatta  
6740 Mt Hwy 327  
Bainville, Mont 59212

e-mail [dnsvann@nemont.net](mailto:dnsvann@nemont.net)  
home phone 406-769-2156  
cell 406-769-7156

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**From:** [Menzies, Lois](#)  
**To:** [Cook, Kevin](#)  
**Subject:** Vannatta -- Public Comment  
**Date:** Monday, March 23, 2015 6:59:12 PM

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**From:** Marlenea Robinson [mailto:[Marlenea.Robinson@AskAllegiance.com](mailto:Marlenea.Robinson@AskAllegiance.com)]  
**Sent:** Monday, March 23, 2015 4:07 PM  
**To:** MT Supreme Court,  
**Subject:** Fourth Judicial District - Public Comment

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission,

I write this email in support of Shane Vannatta. I met Shane through Leadership Montana in September of 2014. He has shown in the past months his love for Montana but also his dedication to law. Shane is a member of our class that many, including myself, have looked to for reasonable and trustworthy leadership. Shane shines in all he does. He is a positive, friendly and an honest person. I know Shane would make an honorable judge and make a major difference in Missoula County where I happily live. I would be proud to have him as a judge in my district.

When the time comes for running I will be the first to sign up to support Mr. Vannatta.

Thank you for your time.

Marlenea Robinson  
Service Team Leader  
Allegiance Benefit Plan Management, Inc.  
Email: [marlenea.robinson@askallegiance.com](mailto:marlenea.robinson@askallegiance.com)

# Pamela J. Bailey

Attorney At Law

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March 23, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
C/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, Montana 59620-3005

Re: Shane A. Vannatta

Dear Members of the Judicial Nomination Commission,

I would like to offer my support for Shane Vannatta who has applied for the appointment to replace Judge McLean as District Court Judge in the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District. I have known Shane for 15 years and highly endorse him for this position.

I first came to know Shane in his position as a Trustee for the State Bar of Montana. Shane represented Area B and I was a Trustee from Billings representing Area H. Eventually, both Shane and I became President of the State Bar.

I often compare Shane to Professor Martin Burke from the University of Montana School of Law. Both are highly intelligent, good listeners, always well-prepared, respected and well-liked.

When you serve as a Trustee and President of the State Bar you are constantly dealing with numerous attorneys with strong and often opposing positions. Shane has the ability to foster positive and productive discussion and help reach fair and justified decisions. While everyone may not agree with the end result, they know that their position was considered and understand the reasoning for the decision that was made.

Shane has an excellent relationship with the members of the Montana Supreme Court. He worked well with members of the Montana Legislature. As a member and past-Chair of the State Bar's Professionalism Committee, Shane has traveled numerous times across our State presenting to attorneys

on ethical issues. He has been actively involved in Bench-Bar conferences. Shane frequently is a presenter at Continuing Legal Educations (CLE) programs. Shane is active with the University of Montana School of Law and serves on the Board of Visitors.

In the last few years, Shane has become active with the American Bar Association and currently serves as the State Bar delegate. I have traveled to several ABA meetings with Shane and can attest that he is well-known and respected on a national level.

I followed Shane as State Bar President. I knew Shane was going to be a very tough act to follow! Shane immediately took me under his wing during his Presidency. He included me as much as possible in the day to day operations of the State Bar. When I took over at the helm, Shane was always available to assist when needed.

I have had the pleasure of knowing Shane not only on a professional level but also on a personal level. I know of no finer attorney or human being. Missoula would be well served with Shane Vannatta as their next District Court Judge.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pamela J. Bailey". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Pamela J. Bailey

March 20, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
Attention: Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

RE: Letter of Support for Shane A. Vannatta

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission,

Having learned of Shane Vannatta's interest and subsequent application for the judgeship, I felt a desire to write a letter of support and express to you why I feel he would be a very strong candidate. I have known Shane for approximately 9 months. He and I are colleagues in the Leadership Montana program. Through this experience and our association, I have come to appreciate many qualities that Shane possess which I believe are transferrable and would be an asset in the role.

Apart from having high integrity, and being a very bright individual, Shane is also very even-tempered and open to hearing all sides of an argument before making judgment. He has a beautiful way of asking questions to understand without placing blame and creating defensiveness. This ability, coupled with his temperament, allows him to get to the heart of an issue very quickly, keeping the focus on the core issue at hand.

I have also found Shane to be a consummate professional in all settings. It seems that Shane never lets his guard down because he never has his guard up. He doesn't seem to have to change who he is based on the setting he is in or the individuals he is with.

Finally, Shane is a very effective communicator. He has the ability to express himself in a clear and concise way; to pull in key facts that have led him to specific conclusions and outcomes. He is friendly, genuine and always appropriate.

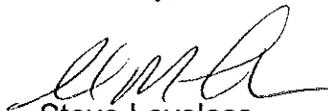
Judicial Nomination Commission

March 20, 2015

Page 2

I have a great deal of respect for Shane. While I have not worked with him in a courtroom setting or on a legal matter, I have had the chance to observe him and feel he would be an outstanding candidate for this judgeship.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SL', written in a cursive style.

Steve Loveless

President & CEO

St. Vincent Healthcare

SL/cb

# McDonald Law Firm, llc

Vicki Nelson McDonald

1714 Forest Meadow Court  
Billings, MT 59102  
Telephone (406) 534-3385  
Fax (406) 534-3385  
[vmcdonaldlawfirm@gmail.com](mailto:vmcdonaldlawfirm@gmail.com)

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March 23, 2015

Montana Supreme Court  
Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005  
[MTsupremecourt@mt.gov](mailto:MTsupremecourt@mt.gov)

SENT VIA EMAIL ONLY

Re: Nomination of Shane Vannatta

To whom it may concern:

I write this letter in support of attorney Shane Vannatta's application to fill Judge McLean's position in Montana's 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District.

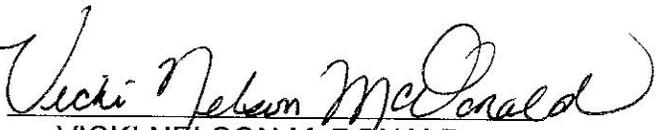
I have known Shane for several years in a professional capacity, and typically as opposing counsel. In representing his clients, I have personally observed Shane to be hard working, diligent, thorough and competent. He is a good attorney and for these reasons alone I believe he is an excellent candidate for district judge.

But more importantly, and what I believe may set Shane apart from other contenders in this field, is his unique consideration and support of others. I have had the opportunity to interact with Shane in a manner that I have not seen from many members of the legal community. For instance, I am a sole practitioner and by most any definition, technologically challenged. When I was having technical problems submitting my legal brief electronically, Shane took the time to analyze my problem and provide me tips and assistance on how to resolve the problem. It was quite a surprise to me that opposing counsel would help the opposition in getting its brief filed on time. Not only was I grateful for his efforts, but I was also encouraged in believing that there are still some stand up individuals who raise the bar for the profession as a whole. These characteristics, compassion coupled with fairness, will serve him well as a district judge, if given the opportunity.

I am grateful for the opportunity to write this letter in support of Shane. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

McDONALD LAW FIRM, llc

By   
VICKI NELSON McDONALD

cc: Shane Vannatta (email)

March 24, 2015

***VIA U.S. MAIL & E-MAIL (MTsupremecourt@mt.gov)***

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

**RE: Letter in Support of Shane Vannatta for Fourth Judicial District  
Appointment**

Dear Members of the Judicial Nomination Committee:

Over the course of the past ten years it has been my privilege to practice law in the same community as Shane Vannatta. Shane is a true professional and exemplifies the traits that I admire and strive to model in my own practice. As a practitioner, Shane is uniquely qualified to handle both complex commercial transactions, as well as civil litigation. Shane is always prepared, extremely well organized, thorough, and above all else, always professional and respectful in his dealings with the bench, opposing counsel and his clients. Shane zealously represents his client's interests, but does so with the highest of ethical standards.

In addition to the high standards by which Shane conducts his practice he is a natural leader. Whether via his service to the State Bar of Montana, his role as a partner at his firm or his involvement in both Leadership Missoula and Leadership Montana, Shane leads by example and has an innate ability to resolve conflicts and build consensus within a group. At the local level Shane routinely acts as a mentor to younger attorneys and is extremely generous with his time and is regularly available as a resource to members of the Western Montana Bar Association and the State Bar of Montana.

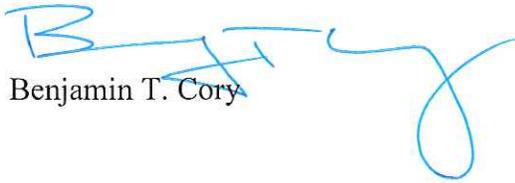
As a practitioner, I believe that it is critical that the commission appoint an individual with a strong background in commercial transactions and civil practice. The volume and complexity of civil cases in the Fourth Judicial District is undeniable. Shane's background and experience in civil matters and commercial transactions would be invaluable to the Fourth Judicial District. In addition to Shane's qualifications with respect to civil matters he has firsthand experience dealing with criminal matters and dependency and neglect cases via his role as a substitute Justice of the Peace. Simply put, Shane's breadth of experience makes him an ideal candidate to handle the wide range of cases that would come before him as a District Court Judge.

March 24, 2015

Page 2

In addition to his experience and qualifications, Shane's demeanor, practicality, attention to detail, sense of fairness, civility and commitment to the justice system make him an excellent candidate for nomination to the Fourth Judicial District. It is with utmost confidence in Shane's qualifications and ability to serve the Fourth Judicial District that I submit this letter in support of Shane Vannatta's nomination.

Sincerely,  
CROWLEY FLECK PLLP

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "B. Cory", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Benjamin T. Cory



(213) 615-8031

james.holmes@sedgwicklaw.com

March 24, 2015

*Via E-mail and U.S. Mail*

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Re: Shane Vannatta

Dear Ms. Menzies:

It is with great honor that I endorse and encourage the appointment of Shane Vannatta to be Judge for the Fourth Judicial District.

I will not spend too much time recounting Shane's leadership and service within the Montana Bar Association. He is the immediate past president of the Bar and a leader of the legal community. He has earned and deserves the respect of his fellow attorneys. This service and leadership more than qualifies Shane to be appointed judge.

I have had the pleasure of working with Shane through the American Bar Association's Commission on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI). I was so impressed with his leadership, focus and commitment within the Association that I encouraged Shane to apply for a presidential appointment to the Commission. I have never regretted that decision as Shane has been an unceasing leader, counselor and innovator. Both as a Commissioner and chair of the Commission's Advocacy Committee, Shane has always demonstrated a skill, knowledge and focus that I find inspiring. Although the SOGI Commission's focus is on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues, Shane has broadened the focus to encompass all aspects of diversity, including gender, race/ethnicity and disabled rights.

It is important that the bench reflects the diversity of the community that it serves. Parties need and deserve to feel that the law reflects their community. Slightly revising a recent report from the Brennan Center for Justice: The United States is more diverse than ever, but its state judges are not. While we recognize that citizens are entitled to a jury of their peers who will be drawn from a pool that reflects the surrounding community, Americans who enter the courtroom often face a predictable presence on the bench: a straight white male. This is the case despite increasing diversity within law school populations and within state bars across the country. Shane presents a unique and extraordinary opportunity to expand the diversity of the Montana bench. He is diverse and he is an exceptional and well-respected attorney and leader of the legal community.

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
Re: Shane Vannatta  
March 24, 2015  
Page 2

Although the Commission is precluded from endorsing any candidates, I speak for all of the members of the SOGI Commission and endorse Shane Vannatta for the bench.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any service or assistance in this matter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James J.S. Holmes". The signature is written over the text "Very truly yours,".

Very truly yours,

James J.S. Holmes  
Sedgwick LLP

JSH/dls

March 24, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005  
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission Members:

I am writing to endorse Shane Vannatta's nomination for the Judgeship in the Fourth Judicial District.

While attending law school at the University of Montana I had the privilege of interning for Mr. Vannatta at Worden Thane, PC. During this time, I worked with Mr. Vannatta on a variety of civil matters. I was impressed with his efficiency and attention to detail. Mr. Vannatta has earned the respect of his colleagues for his excellent legal work and reputation for honesty. He earned my respect because he is kind to his coworkers and assists young lawyers in their legal education.

Mr. Vannatta has practiced law in Montana for over twenty years. In addition to his extensive legal practice, Mr. Vannatta has been deeply involved in serving both the bar and his community. Mr. Vannatta is a past President of the State Bar and currently serves in the ABA House of Delegates and as an ABA Commissioner. As a Montana native, Mr. Vannatta understands the unique needs of his community and is well suited to represent them.

I would like to thank the committee for their time and encourage their consideration of Mr. Vannatta when making nominations for the Judgeship.

Sincerely,



Burt W. Ward

March 24, 2015

To the members of the Judicial Nomination Commission,

I am writing to enthusiastically support the appointment of Shane Vannatta to the position of judge in the Fourth Judicial District. I have had the privilege of working and interacting with Shane over the past six years in multiple contexts: first, in his role as an attorney, and second, through community organizations such as Leadership Montana and the State Bar.

The word "*attorney*" comes from the ancient Anglo-French word *aturné*, meaning literally "one who is turned to." In this sense Shane is an *attorney* in the original and truest sense of the word.

Whenever I have a knotty problem that needs to be sorted, I turn to Shane. I know many others within our community do, as well. Of course, he understands—and shares—the legal implications, based on his long experience as an excellent attorney in the State of Montana. Even more valuable for me personally is that he evaluates issues with an eye for the ethical considerations and the social impact as well. Shane considers questions objectively and provides a logical, fully honest response. He is extremely practical and makes a point of focusing on resolving issues quickly without unnecessary litigation, which is important both for his clients, and the community.

Shane is a demonstrated leader in our community and takes on volunteer roles with passion and enthusiasm. This includes his commitments to the State Bar of Montana and the Western Montana Bar Association. In all of his work and volunteer service that I have seen, he is reliable, timely, has fantastic attention to detail, and most importantly, he *cares* about everything he does.

I support Shane for the position of judge both wholeheartedly and with sadness. By appointing Shane to this position our community will lose a truly great practicing attorney. In the process, however, we will undoubtedly gain an OUTSTANDING judge.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. Davidoff', written in a cursive style.

Sherri Davidoff  
*Founder, LMG Security*

MARTIN ROGERS  
210 BENTON AVE., MISSOULA, MT 59801  
(406) 239-0243 • MARTIN.ROGERS@UMONTANA.EDU

March 25, 2015

*via e-mail*

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005  
mtsupremecourt@mt.gov

Re: Public Comment, Shane Vannatta

Judicial Nomination Commission:

I write to the Commission as a current 2L law student at the University of Montana, and a legal intern to Shane Vannatta. I wish to express my upmost confidence in Shane, and recommend his appointment. Shane has been an incredible employer, but more accurately a mentor. He is one of the kindest, fairest, and most knowledgeable men I know.

During Justice Sonia Sotomayor's nomination, the President, during his remarks listed the qualities required of the bench. First, rigorous intellect—a mastery of the law, the ability to provide clear answers to complex legal questions. Second, a recognition of the limits of the judicial role, an understanding the bench is to interpret and not make law, using an impartial approach without agenda. Lastly, experience tested by obstacles and barriers, by hardships and misfortune, being able to overcome those barriers, and come out with a sense of compassion and an understanding of how the world works.

The already impressive support Shane has received, and his equally impressive resume show Shane possesses these qualities. Above all else, I wish to convey I have firsthand seen his every day understanding of how the world works, his compassion towards clients, his unwavering enthusiasm, and his never ending want to reach an equitable result within the bounds of the law. For these reasons, and for all the reasons given by supporters before me, I ask that Shane receive this nomination.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me.

Sincerely,

/S/

Martin Rogers





March 23, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005  
[MTsupremecourt@mt.gov](mailto:MTsupremecourt@mt.gov)

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

It is my very great pleasure and honor to write this letter in support of Shane Vannatta's application for judgeship in the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District of Montana.

I have known Shane on a professional level for over 5 years and am confident that he will make a great district judge. I have come to rely on his intellect, integrity and responsiveness whenever I seek his advice. Shane has a calm and easy manner with a willingness to go the extra mile for his clients. It is my belief that you will be hard-pressed to find a more qualified candidate.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Scott Colton".

Scott Colton  
President  
Adelos, Inc.  
(406) 745-5710

March 24, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005  
[MTsupremecourt@mt.gov](mailto:MTsupremecourt@mt.gov)

Re: Shane Vannatta Judicial Nomination

Dear Lois Menzies:

It is with honor and privilege that I submit this letter expressing my experience with Shane Vannatta as an attorney, advisor, and friend. My association with Shane has been both personally and professionally.

As the current Chief Executive Officer of Neptune Aviation Services I come into contact on a daily basis with businessmen, lawyers, accountants, and other professionals. Based on these contacts I have developed a good sense for individuals of high integrity, professionalism, and sound character. Shane exhibits these characteristics. His work ethic, competency, integrity, and genuine caring for people are all traits found in Shane.

I have experience and observed first-hand on many occasions Shane's dedication and passion for doing the right thing. It is often said that "it is not what one does when people are watching, it is what one does when no one is watching" that demonstrate the character of an individual. Shane's actions always reflect doing the right thing and doing so in a manner that reflects caring and concern. Shane's integrity, compassion, and work ethic rank as the most important qualities when considering one for the position of District Judge.

Shane has worked hard to maintain his professional skills and no one is more dedicated to his profession than Shane. He is committed to the ethics and values of our legal system and those who work within that system.

Shane is an excellent communicator, both orally and in writing. He has the innate ability to deliver messages and decisions in an appropriate tone and with compassion. His writing skills are unquestionably professional in nature and comprehensive in content.



Shane has been an exceptional representative of our community and the legal profession, while at the same time tending to his personal life. He strikes a healthy balance between his occupation and his personal growth and wellbeing.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my support for Shane in his desire to be selected as a District Judge. Shane is the right choice for the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District in Missoula, MT. He will serve the community with dignity, compassion, knowledge, and skill for many years.

Respectfully,

/s/Ronald E Hooper

RONALD E. HOOPER

March 23, 2015

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission,

The intent of this letter is for my support of Shane Vannatta to be appointed as District Court Judge for the Fourth Judicial District seat. My recommendation comes from my long time working and personal relationship with Shane.

My name is Kori Jo Schloemer. I grew up in Montana and earned a degree in Political Science from the University of Montana. In 1991, I received my law degree from New England School of Law and became a member of the Massachusetts Bar. I was lucky to return to Montana in 1993 after being hired by Attorney Phil Tawney of Tawney and Dayton. I met Shane while studying for the bar. He invited me to join the first chapter of the New Lawyers Association of Missoula after we had both successfully passed the bar. In 1994, I become salaried In-House attorney for Neptune Aviation Services, Inc. and Northstar Jet, Inc. The companies are located in Missoula Montana, and I have held that position since that time.

One of my jobs as a general counsel has been recommending or hiring outside counsel in specialized areas of law. In 2001, Shane "officially" became Neptune and Northstar's outside counsel. Neptune and Northstar have a diverse workforce with over 180 employees. The legal matters range from employee issues to unique contractual matters. Shane in his role as outside counsel has displayed all the qualifications and skills which will transfer to being a great judge.

In addition, having an excellent legal mind, Shane has the ability to listen and communicate with an understanding of human nature. He also treats all people with the same respect whether he is dealing with the CEO or an hourly employee. This ability goes beyond knowing the law it also shows the character and compassion of Shane as a person. I of course cannot discuss any details of Shane's legal representation, but I can state we have had many confidential conversations over the years. Shane always stressed the law to be followed even if it might not be the easiest or the most desired position to pursue. He represents what all lawyers should strive to be which is moral, ethical and giving our profession a good name. I consider myself lucky to call him a friend and colleague.

The bottom line, if Shane is appointed it will be a loss for myself and the companies, but it will be a huge benefit for the legal community as a whole and all of those who enter his court room.

Thank you for your consideration of Shane,

Kori Jo Schloemer

General Counsel, Neptune Aviation & Northstar Jet.

**From:** [Menzies, Lois](#)  
**To:** [Cook, Kevin](#)  
**Subject:** Vannatta -- Public Comment  
**Date:** Wednesday, March 25, 2015 7:45:53 AM

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**From:** Matthew J. Cuffe [mailto:[mcuffe@wordenthane.com](mailto:mcuffe@wordenthane.com)]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 24, 2015 10:25 AM  
**To:** MT Supreme Court,  
**Subject:** Letter of Support for Shane A. Vannatta

Dear Members of the Commission and Governor Bullock:

I tell you that Shane A. Vannatta has my unqualified support for appointment as District Court Judge in the Fourth Judicial District. I am not pleased to give this letter of support and I do not provide it enthusiastically. I say that because Shane is my business partner and my friend. As a member of our firm Shane has served as an associate, shareholder, officer, director, executive committee member, and mentor. His service to our clients has been extraordinary.

And while Shane will be dearly missed at our firm (and me personally), his work ethic and legal knowledge, specifically his civil and business law experience, are needed at the district court level. It is his experience in those areas that makes him the most qualified available candidate.

So knowing full well that we will lose a valuable member of our firm, and knowing full well I will miss seeing my friend on a daily basis, I say the Commission should place his name in nomination to the Governor. Governor Bullock could not appoint a better, more qualified person as District Court Judge.

**Matthew J. Cuffe, Esq.**



111 N. Higgins Ave., Suite 600  
P.O. Box 4747  
Missoula, MT 59806-4747  
Phone: (406) 721-3400  
Fax: (406) 721-6985  
[www.wordenthane.com](http://www.wordenthane.com)

**From:** [Menzies, Lois](#)  
**To:** [Cook, Kevin](#)  
**Subject:** Vannatta -- Public Comment  
**Date:** Wednesday, March 25, 2015 7:44:51 AM

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**From:** Kristen Nicolarsen [mailto:kristen@neptuneaviation.com]  
**Sent:** Monday, March 23, 2015 9:54 PM  
**To:** MT Supreme Court,  
**Subject:** Shane Vannatta Judicial Nomination

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
[PO Box 203005](#)  
[Helena, MT 59620-3005](#)  
[MTsupremecourt@mt.gov](mailto:MTsupremecourt@mt.gov)

Re: Shane Vannatta Judicial Nomination

Dear Lois Menzies:

It is with great honor and pleasure that I write this letter about my experiences with Shane Vannatta as an attorney, advisor and friend for more than two decades both professionally and personally.

As an employee of Neptune Aviation Services, Inc and Northstar Jet, Inc. for 23 years, former President/CEO, promoted to Vice Chair of the Board, I have worked with thousands of individuals as well as hundreds of businesses. I feel confident recognizing the sound character of an honest, dependable, caring individual who understands people. Shane personifies these qualities. His work ethic, competency, knowledge, unbiased and insightful wisdom are unmatched.

One of the qualities I appreciate most in Shane is his integrity. I have observed firsthand on many occasions the positive effects of Shane's dedication and passion for 'doing the right thing,' which makes him a valued and trusted community leader and friend. This trait ranks at the top of my list when I think about the person I would want to be a District Judge.

Discerning, objective, patient, tactful, compassionate, and understanding are words that have been forgotten by many people in today's political and professional worlds. However, these are virtues that personify Shane. You can trust him at his word even in the tensest situations. You will not find anyone more dedicated to ensuring his professional services are the best in the industry.

Shane's verbal skills make him an exceptional communicator. He has a keen ability to effectively communicate with anyone and his demeanor makes him very approachable. He is very attentive and a great listener. Speaking with Shane, I find he always gives me his full attention and time.

Too often we see people getting ahead professionally at the expense of a quality relationship with their family and friends. This is not the case with Shane. He has been able to excel as an excellent ambassador for our community, respected leader and partner at Worden Thane,

P.C. while still being an endearing son, sibling, nephew, cousin, and trust-based friend. I feel individuals draw inspiration and find encouragement in the lives and actions of their leaders. As one of Shane's peers, I have benefited from watching his positive actions of juggling a high profile, demanding job while maintaining balance in his life as a respected attorney, quality family-man and faithful friend.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my admiration and respect. Shane is the right choice for the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District in Missoula, MT. If chosen, our community will reap the benefits for years to come.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Kristen Nicolarsen  
[\(406\)207-6045](tel:(406)207-6045)

Sent from my iPad

**From:** [Menzies, Lois](#)  
**To:** [Cook, Kevin](#)  
**Subject:** Vannatta -- Public Comment  
**Date:** Wednesday, March 25, 2015 7:47:02 AM

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**From:** J Schulte [mailto:[jcs@jschultelaw.com](mailto:jcs@jschultelaw.com)]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 24, 2015 4:02 PM  
**To:** MT Supreme Court,  
**Cc:** 'J Schulte'  
**Subject:** Letter of support for Shane Vannatta

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Re: Shane Vannatta

Dear Commission Members:

There are at least three highly qualified individuals whose names I believe should be submitted to Governor Bullock for his ultimate selection of Judge McLean's replacement. After much thought, I have decided to support Shane Vannatta to be the next Fourth Judicial District Court Judge. I made this choice by considering all of the usual factors of integrity, temperament, intelligence, etc, but the traditional method of evaluation and analysis did not really separate the several extremely qualified candidates. This is because they all possess qualities that are extremely desirable in a district court judge. So, I made my decision for the following reasons:

1. Shane's wide breadth of experience in the private practice of law;
2. Shane's varied life experiences that allow him to truly understand the litigants, witnesses and lawyers appearing before him;
3. Shane's long service to the State Bar of Montana;
4. Shane's service as a member of the American Bar Associations Commission Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity; and
5. Shane's ongoing service to the American Bar Association as Montana's Delegate to the ABA House of Delegates.

There is no doubt in my mind that Shane will make an outstanding judge. He has earned the opportunity to have his name submitted to Governor Bullock for the Governor's consideration for appointment.

Shane's unselfish service to the members of the bar, his demonstrated commitment to improve the legal profession, his dedication to eradicating bias while promoting diversity, and his unfailing promotion of the rule of law result in Shane being the absolute ideal choice to be the next Montana Fourth Judicial Court Judge.

Thank you for your consideration.

John C. Schulte  
SCHULTE LAW FIRM P.C.  
2425 Mullan Road  
Missoula, MT 59808  
(406) 721-6655  
(406) 543-5023 (fax)  
[jcs@jschultelaw.com](mailto:jcs@jschultelaw.com)





MONTANA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

*all about Montana's future*

March 24, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005  
Via Email: MTsupremecourt@mt.gov

Dear Members of the Commission,

Please consider this letter of support as you evaluate Shane A. Vannatta's application for the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court Judgeship. I'm writing to offer my personal support for Mr. Vannatta's candidacy. I have become acquainted with Shane as a classmate in this year's Leadership Montana class.

Through my interaction with Mr. Vannatta, I have been impressed by the manner in which he is able to effectively communicate his perspective, how openly he listens to others' concerns and the way in which he seeks to find common ground in reaching mutually beneficial solutions. I recently sought his advice on how best to handle a prickly situation. First and foremost, he counseled me to always proceed as though the parties were operating from positions of good intent. He has demonstrated impeccable integrity in our dealings. All of these characteristics are ones that I believe would be of interest and importance as you deliberate on potential candidates for this position.

It has been my sincere pleasure making Mr. Vannatta's acquaintance. I now consider him a trusted confidant. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions you might have about my support of his candidacy.

Sincerely,

*Mary*

Mary K. Rutherford, MA, CFRE  
President and Chief Executive Officer



Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Lois,

I am writing this letter in solid support of Shane Vannatta's application to serve as 4th Judicial District Judge.

I've known Shane professionally for several years now. He was recommended to us by someone in our industry who had been working with him for years. This individual indicated his respect for Shane's character and for his knowledge of our industry, as well as Shane's presence as a key member of their business team as their company continued to grow.

Here at Headframe Spirits, we had come to a realization. We recognized that we expected excellence, true excellence, out of anyone who was going to work for us but hadn't, until that point, extended that demand of our outside vendors. When we recognized that this was a strong need for us, we terminated our relationship with our existing attorney and began looking for a new one, looking for someone who would care as much about our business as we do. We were very grateful to share this background with Shane and have him hear and respect our interests.

A relationship with an attorney is a lot like a relationship with a doctor. Those relationships are of the most value when the client feels the ability to be completely honest and vulnerable with the professional. To that end, it's been an incredible working relationship with Shane. Very quickly we were able to establish the working relationship which has him engaging with us like a member of our team. He listens well, asks incredibly astute questions and provides advice which takes into account both the law as well as our own preferred methods of operation. Shane understands our corporate values and our ethics and always provides recommendations which blend the letter of the law with what fits our corporate culture. I trust him without qualification. His character and integrity are guideposts in navigating the difficult decisions of strong business decision making and leadership.

I had a chance to engage with Shane recently through Leadership Montana. It was a true pleasure to watch the way he and his peers interacted. Shane has clearly established his outstanding character, his leadership skills and his dedication to the issues concerning Montanans to this group of outstanding representatives of our state. To that end, I believe he demonstrates broad community support and electability.





As to Shane's professional qualifications, I believe his resume and application speak to that better than I can. I do believe that Shane's deep understanding of the law, as well as his passion for Montana make him an excellent Judicial candidate.

I've grown to trust Shane as an advisor, a mentor and a barometer. Pardon the pun, but Shane is the best of our collective character, distilled. I can't state emphatically enough my support for his appointment to the 4th Judicial District judgeship.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Courtney McKee".

Courtney McKee



March 25, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Re: Fourth Judicial District Judge Position---Shane Anthony Vannatta

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission Members:

We have the luxury of having at least three highly qualified candidates to complete the term of Hon. Ed McLean in the Fourth Judicial District. I encourage you to forward the name of Shane Vannatta to Gov. Bullock for his consideration.

Shane Vannatta and I have collaborated on cases for some clients with common interests, and negotiated solutions for other clients in very adversarial situations. Whether disagreeing vehemently or endorsing my client's position whole heartedly, Shane's demeanor never seems to change. Shane is the type of lawyer who can argue vigorously and obtain a great result for his client, and then get a call from the opposing party a year or two later, wondering if Shane could represent them in a different matter. Shane has a unique ability to be resolute and kind simultaneously. Shane stands as an example of civility and competence for young persons, other lawyers and their clients, and all citizens of conscience.

Shane has shown a profound commitment to public service, through his dedication to the State Bar of Montana, the American Bar Association and countless other groups dedicated to the improvement of justice. If Shane were appointed to the bench, the private practice of law would lose an excellent lawyer who is beloved by his clients and respected by his peers. The people of Western Montana, on the other hand, would gain a smart, patient, compassionate, hard-working and excellent judge.

Sincerely,



Dirk A. Williams  
Attorney at Law  
P.O. Box 7099  
Missoula, MT 59807

March 25, 2015

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL ONLY  
Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005  
[MTsupremecourt@mt.gov](mailto:MTsupremecourt@mt.gov)

Dear Ms. Menzies:

I am writing to support the application of Shane Vannatta for the vacancy created in the Fourth Judicial District by Judge McLean's retirement. All of the candidates are well-qualified, and I believe that they would make fine judges. However, my experience with Shane comes from my involvement with the Western Montana Bar Association and his mentoring of me as I was on the Board and ultimately President of that organization.

One of the challenges facing a local bar organization is how to meet the needs of the varied members, who represent different practices groups and thus different educational and organizational needs. When I began working with the WMBA, Shane was instrumental in training and mentoring new board members, to make sure we understood the breadth of our group and planned CLEs and other gatherings in a manner that was as inclusive as possible. Shane's commitment to public service was exemplified by his dedication and devotion of time to our group, even though he was not a member of the board. He was a wonderful liaison to the State Bar, and helped us find resources, financial and otherwise, to provide quality programming to our local bar.

Shane has a high level of enthusiasm and work ethic, combined with his intelligence and compassion. Although I do not practice in the same area of law as Shane, I know he is well respected as an attorney and as a person. He has broad experience in many different areas of civil litigation, and I believe he is a very well-qualified and exceptional applicant for this position.

Sincerely,

  
Kathleen L. DeSoto



111 N. HIGGINS, SUITE 600  
P.O. BOX 4747  
MISSOULA, MONTANA 59806-4747  
TELEPHONE (406) 721-3400  
FAX (406) 721-6985  
[www.wordenthane.com](http://www.wordenthane.com)

DONOVAN WORDEN, SR., 1892-1967  
DONOVAN WORDEN, JR., 1918-2001

JEREMY G. THANE, RETIRED

RONALD A. BENDER  
PATRICK G. FRANK  
MARTIN S. KING  
PATRICK DOUGHERTY  
W. CARL MENDENHALL  
GAIL M. HAVILAND  
SHANE A. VANNATTA  
PETER S. DAYTON  
SEAN M. MORRIS  
REID J. PERKINS  
WILLIAM E. McCARTHY  
MATTHEW J. CUFFE  
JANE E. COWLEY  
COLLEEN M. DOWDALL  
AMY M. SCOTT SMITH  
JORI QUINLAN  
JESSE C. KODADEK  
CHRIS A. JOHNSON

March 25, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005  
[Mtsupremecourt@mt.gov](mailto:Mtsupremecourt@mt.gov)

Re: Letter of Support for Shane A. Vannatta

Dear Members of the Commission and Governor Bullock:

Please consider this as a letter of support for the appointment of Shane Vannatta as a District Court Judge for the Fourth Judicial District Court to replace the retiring Hon. Judge Ed McLean.

I have known and practiced law with Shane for well over 20 years beginning when I hired him as an intern at Worden Thane (then Worden, Thane & Haines), in the early 1990's . Since then, and without fail, Shane has shown himself to be intelligent, capable, honest, hardworking, diligent, professional, scholarly, energetic, community-minded, fair and willing to listen. All characteristics we need in our trial judges.

We need more good judges. With that in mind, I wholeheartedly recommend Shane.

Sincerely,

  
Martin S. King

# THIEL LAW OFFICE, PLLC

327 WEST PINE  
P.O. Box 8125  
MISSOULA, MT 59807  
(406) 543-1550  
www.thiellaw.com

MATTHEW B. THIEL, ESQ.  
matt@thiellaw.com

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March 25, 2015

**Sent via Electronic Mail to:**

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005  
[MTsupremecourt@mt.gov](mailto:MTsupremecourt@mt.gov)

RE: Letter in Support of Shane A. Vannatta

Dear Commission Members:

I am pleased to write in support of Shane A. Vannatta's application for appointment to the Fourth Judicial District Court. I have known Shane for 21 years and believe him to be an excellent choice to serve the remainder of Judge McLean's term and know he will work hard to serve the citizens of Missoula County for years to come.

Shane and I were members of the University of Montana Law School Class of 1993 where we served on the *Montana Law Review* as staff members. Shane was an excellent student who demonstrated a sincere love of the law and was one of the hardest working people I had ever met. Shane demonstrated a reliable commitment of long hours to the Law review effort, in addition to academics; and always with a positive and supportive attitude.

I have maintained regular contact with Shane as we have worked and consulted on numerous professional and public service issues during our legal careers in Missoula. At Shane's urging in 2008, I ran for a Trustee position with the State Bar of Montana. Since that time, I have worked closely with Shane, first as a Trustee and later on the State Bar Executive Committee. During the past seven years, I have had the opportunity to work with Shane on many challenging issues related to the practice of law and Bar service. During my time as a Trustee, Shane served as the Chair of the Board of Trustees, President-elect, President, and Past President

of the State Bar. Shane has continued his service to the State Bar and currently serves as the ABA delegate. Shane has consistently maintained a respected legal career while giving hundreds of hours of public and pro bono service to the State Bar. Bar staff and leaders have routinely relied on Shane's professionalism and sound judgment to assist in addressing many challenging Bar issues. Shane leads by example and asks more of himself than those he serves with. Because of this, Shane has distinguished himself as a respected and effective leader in the Montana Bar.

Shane has, during the past 21 years as part of the Montana legal community, demonstrated a genuine concern for the improvement of society through the law; through the high standards he sets in his legal work, the high standards of professionalism he seeks in himself and inspires in others, and his consistent public service including regular service as a substitute Judge in the Justice Court. Those who work with Shane will testify to the energy and optimism he brings to pursuing even the most stressful of projects. Shane is the type of person who makes everyone around him work more effectively together, which will serve him well as Judge.

Shane has the demonstrated ability to make a significant contribution to the Fourth Judicial District Court. He offers a commitment to legal scholarship, hard work and a commitment to setting the highest standards of professionalism. Importantly, Shane has had a long and productive private law practice, which provides him with a diverse background in both civil and criminal law.

Shane possesses uncompromising integrity and he can be counted on to deliver on the commitments he makes to others. I respectfully request that you include Shane on the list of candidates forwarded to Governor Bullock for consideration.

Sincerely,

THIEL LAW OFFICE, PLLC



Matthew B. Thiel

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission,

I am writing in support of Shane Vannatta's application to be appointed as a District Court judge for the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District. I have known Shane for almost ten years as both a colleague and as a friend. My own career path has taken me from the Public Defender's Office to my current position as Chief Deputy County Attorney for Missoula County. Due to my professional background, one of the first things I think about regarding a potential judicial appointee is what qualities they will bring to the bench when sitting on criminal cases. I can tell you that regardless of his background practicing civil law, I think Shane is well qualified and suited to preside over criminal cases.

I first met Shane when he was the presiding judge in my first jury trial. I had just started at the Public Defender's Office and he was a substitute judge in Justice Court. He, unlike my experience with some members of the civil bar who sit as acting Justices of the Peace, proved to understand criminal law and how the rules of evidence applied to criminal cases. Since then, I have tried cases before Shane as both a defense attorney and a prosecutor. In both scenarios, I found he was an extremely fair and thoughtful judge. He did not favor one side over the other, but always made efforts to listen to both and make a decision based on the law. Perhaps just as importantly, he treats everyone respectfully. It does not matter if the person he is addressing is a criminal defendant, a victim, an intern, or an established and respected attorney. He always listens and gives a thoughtful response which means a lot to those of us who practice law as well as to people caught up in the legal system to whom simply knowing they have been heard means a lot.

Shane has the intellect to do the job. There is no question that he is one of the smartest people I know. He has a fantastic understanding of diverse areas of the law. As a judge, Shane would be careful to follow the law as set forth by precedent in the Supreme Court. If a case of first impression came before him, he would attempt to follow the policy behind the law in thoughtfully rendering a decision.

Shane possess the ideal judicial temperament. He has proven to be careful in his thought process and never impulsive or swayed by emotion. He has a strong sense of self and puts the law before ego or concern for what others think.

Overall, I can tell you that Shane has all of the qualities I would want to see in a District Court Judge and his application has my full support.

Sincerely,

Jason Marks

**JAMES J. MASAR**  
ATTORNEY AT LAW

600 The Florence  
111 North Higgins Avenue, 59802  
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Missoula, Montana 59807-8688

Telephone (406)721-7737  
E-Mail: jmasar@aol.com

March 25, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005  
[Mtsupremecourt@mt.gov](mailto:Mtsupremecourt@mt.gov)

Dear Commissioners:

I am pleased for this opportunity to voice my unqualified support for your appointment of Shane Vannatta to fill the vacancy to be created in the Fourth Judicial District when Judge Ed McLean retires.

As a sole practitioner with an office adjacent to Worden Thane P.C. where Shane is a partner, I have come to know him quite well over the years. The proximity of our offices has allowed me to observe him in his daily practice and to benefit from his consultation on various complicated matters.

I know Shane to be a superior communicator who listens, speaks and writes exceptionally well. His intellect allows him to quickly assimilate facts and identify proposed solutions. In managing his cases in a timely manner I know Shane successfully engages with other counsel and the staff on whom he relies. In his practice and his personal endeavors Shane demonstrates his sincere interest in and respect for others. He is well known for his compassion and for being broad minded and fair. I appreciate in Shane that he is approachable and unpretentious, and serves his clients exceptionally well.

Shane is a person of great integrity and personal character who is deeply committed to the legal profession and to his community. As his application attests, Shane freely contributes significant time and leadership to activities that strengthen and support both of these. Shane is a past President of the MT State Bar and an active leader since 1995, a member of Leadership Montana, the Missoula Chamber Ambassadors and a lifetime member of the University of Montana Alumni Association.

Judicial Nomination Commission

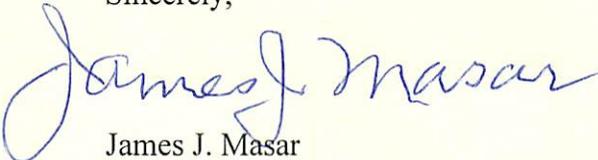
March 25, 2015

Page 2

Coming with Shane to the District Court will his perspective from presiding over jury trials and bench trials as justice of the peace *pro tem* for Missoula County Justice Court. He brings with him as well 21 years of active litigation practice focused on the wide range of civil matters which in fact made up nearly 36 percent of the cases filed and reopened in the Fourth Judicial District Court in 2014.

Shane's application makes clear that he has the energy, the work ethic, the experience, the personal character, the human qualities and the common sense you will require of the next Fourth Judicial District Court Judge. I have every confidence that Shane Vannatta will exceed your expectations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James J. Masar". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "M".

James J. Masar



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FAX (406) 721-6985  
[www.wordenthane.com](http://www.wordenthane.com)

DONOVAN WORDEN, SR., 1892-1967  
DONOVAN WORDEN, JR., 1918-2001  
JEREMY G. THANE, RETIRED

RONALD A. BENDER  
PATRICK G. FRANK  
MARTIN S. KING  
PATRICK DOUGHERTY  
W. CARL MENDENHALL  
GAIL M. HAVILAND  
SHANE A. VANNATTA  
PETER S. DAYTON  
SEAN M. MORRIS  
REID J. PERKINS  
WILLIAM E. McCARTHY  
MATTHEW J. CUFFE  
JANE E. COWLEY  
COLLEEN M. DOWDALL  
AMY M. SCOTT SMITH  
JORI QUINLAN  
JESSE C. KODADEK  
CHRIS A. JOHNSON

March 24, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005  
[Mtsupremecourt@mt.gov](mailto:Mtsupremecourt@mt.gov)

Re: Letter of Support for Shane A. Vannatta

Dear Members of the Commission and Governor Bullock:

We are pleased to submit this letter in support of the appointment of Shane A. Vannatta as District Court Judge in the Fourth Judicial District. While Shane's work ethic, knowledge, and intelligence will be missed, we can only wish the best for our friend. You will not find a better qualified candidate. Shane has our unqualified and enthusiastic support.

Shane's interest in Judge McLean's position comes as no surprise to us. Shane began notifying us well over six years ago when other judges in the Fourth Judicial District began retiring. He may have applied for other positions sooner had it not been for his commitments to the State Bar of Montana, the American Bar Association, and the firm. Shane always honors his commitments.

Shane is an integral part of our firm, and has served as an associate, shareholder, officer, director, executive committee member, and mentor. He readily assumes leadership roles when requested, and can always be counted upon to contribute to our firm. Indeed, many of the most positive changes in the firm can be attributed to Shane's creativity and passion for improving everything he touches.

Shane's service to his clients is unparalleled. His personnel file is stuffed with numerous thank-yous, compliments, and other positive remarks from clients Shane has assisted over the years. Many of Shane's clients have written letters of support to you, something we find extraordinary given the selfless nature of those letters – if appointed, Shane will no longer be allowed to represent those same clients.

Other letters of support have attested to Shane's integrity, professionalism, honesty, even temperament, and calm demeanor. We echo those sentiments. He employs those attributes with great success for the

benefit of our clients and our firm.

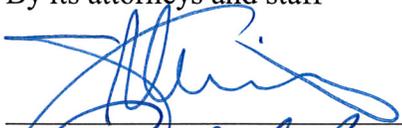
Additionally, we must emphasize Shane's incredible work ethic. Shane will not stop until the job is done and done right. Despite his many volunteer commitments, Shane has always made certain that his volunteer time didn't come at the expense of his clients or the firm. During Shane's year as President of the State Bar of Montana, Shane expended over 700 hours for State Bar activities and still managed to meet his billable hour requirements and the expectations of the firm. We saw him working evenings and weekends to get the work done.

We urge the Commission to give Shane's application every consideration, and place his name in nomination to the Governor. We urge Governor Bullock to appoint Shane to Judge McLean's position. Shane is the best, most-qualified candidate for this judgeship. The people of Missoula and Mineral Counties would be well-served having Shane Vannatta as District Court Judge.

Sincerely,

WORDEN THANE P.C.

By its attorneys and staff

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Ronald D. Bender

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Rose Kist

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Neil M. Haviland

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Reid Pedersen

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Amy Aston

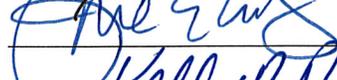
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dan Gentry

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Karen Ober

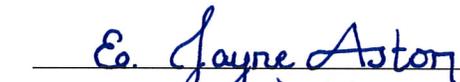
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Mary Ellen O'Honnell

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
James DeLoe

  
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Joe Apple

  
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Eric Elms

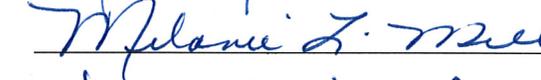
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Kelly Bender

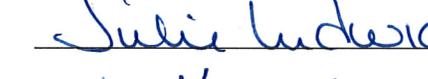
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
E. Jayne Aston

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Mary M. Niccolucci

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Kristin P. Marshall

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Melanie Z. Meier

  
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Julie Ludwick

  
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Jan Kaddek

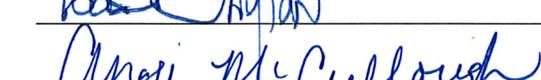
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
W. Carl Mendenhall

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dawn Donham

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Patricia Hanerky

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Ed Wadell

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Peter O'Ryan

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Angie McCullough



**WORDEN  
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ATTORNEYS AT LAW

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COLLEEN M. DOWDALL  
AMY M. SCOTT SMITH  
JORI QUINLAN  
JESSE C. KODADEK  
CHRIS A. JOHNSON

March 25, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005  
[Mtsupremecourt@mt.gov](mailto:Mtsupremecourt@mt.gov)

RE: Recommendation of Shane A. Vannatta

Dear Judicial Nomination Commission:

It is an honor to recommend Shane A. Vannatta for the Fourth District Court Judgeship in Missoula. He has worked at Worden Thane P.C., for over 20 years practicing law. He has extensive legal experience in civil law, commercial litigation, trademark infringement, copyright law, corporate and business law. He grew up in Bainville, Montana and is aware of the issues concerning laws in Montana. He graduated from the University of Montana School of Law J.D. with honors in 1993.

Having worked for him for several years I know that he is honest, hardworking and open minded. Shane Vannatta will serve the community well as a District Court Judge making fair and honest judgements. He is highly educated, an outstanding communicator that is easily approachable and conservation minded. I highly recommend him and his fair and honest personality for District Court Judge.

If you have any questions or comments please feel free to call, email or stop by my office.

Sincerely,

Kelly B. Bender

**KALKSTEIN, JOHNSON & DYE, P.C.**

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MISSOULA, MT 59807-8568  
e-mail: [cj@kalksteinlaw.com](mailto:cj@kalksteinlaw.com)

Gary Kalkstein  
C. J. Johnson  
Travis Dye  
Helia Jazayeri  
Jennifer Loobey,  
Office Manager

(406) 721-9800  
FAX: (406) 721-9896

March 25, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of the Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620

Re: Shane Vannatta

Dear Ms. Menzies:

I respectfully recommend Missoula attorney Shane Vannatta to the Judicial Nomination Commission. I have known Shane for almost fifteen years. He is an extremely capable lawyer – intelligent, pragmatic, reasonable, and kind. His work on transactional and litigated matters alike has been, in my experience, outstanding.

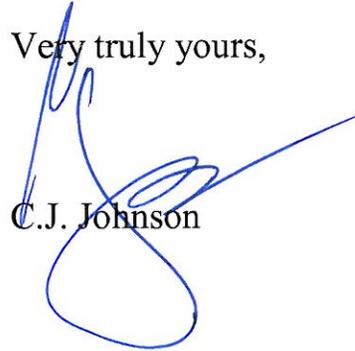
I have likewise been impressed with Shane's commitment to the bar, and the manner in which he has been able to so broadly connect with so many different personalities over so many different issues. Importantly, Shane also understands that true commitment to the practice of law requires an understanding of our judiciary and how it operates – not theoretically, but in reality.

Lois Menzies  
Re: Shane Vannatta  
March 25, 2015  
Page 2

That understanding truly does run deep in Shane. He possesses encyclopedic knowledge – statistical and otherwise – regarding the Fourth Judicial District and how it functions. More importantly, I believe that he possesses the knowledge and skill set to understand how the Fourth Judicial District can best function moving forward.

I believe that Shane would be an outstanding judge and I recommend him highly. Thank you.

Very truly yours,

  
C.J. Johnson

CJ/jl

**From:** [Menzies, Lois](#)  
**To:** [Cook, Kevin](#)  
**Subject:** Vannatta -- Public Comment  
**Date:** Wednesday, March 25, 2015 8:59:45 PM  
**Attachments:** [image001.png](#)

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**From:** Colleen M. Dowdall [mailto:cdowdall@wordenthane.com]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 25, 2015 4:13 PM  
**To:** MT Supreme Court,  
**Subject:** Application of Shane Vannatta for District Court Judge 4th Judicial District

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Commission Members:

I have been an attorney since 1981. I know nearly all of the candidates for Judge McLean's seat on the bench. You have a difficult decision because these candidates are extraordinary. My decision to express my support for Shane Vannatta was an easy one. I have worked with Shane for many years, as an adversary and as a partner in Worden Thane.

I would like only a few things for a district court judge. I want someone who has a professional judicial demeanor. By this I mean, I want a district court judge who is not unjustifiably cranky. I want a judge that is hard working. I want a judge with experience in a broad range of legal issues with a personal background that provides the perspective needed to fairly judge the disputes of Montanans.

It may be that each of the candidates possesses these qualities. I am sure that Shane does. Shane is fair and gets along with everyone in the lawfirm. He has professional relationships with opposing attorneys. He is never ornery for the sake of being ornery. He has served as a substitute judge in other courts and is considered to be a good judge.

When Shane was State Bar President just a few years ago, he did not miss a beat in the practice of law. He did give the State Bar a lot of his time but he practiced law as if he had all of the time in the world. Sometimes we wait months or years for decisions from judges. It is difficult to explain to a client why I can't get a decision. Shane will be one of those hard working judges that makes decisions promptly.

Shane's practice is diverse. This is important. I have found his greatest strength is his ability to keep cases moving. He is successful because he knows and respects the rules that govern litigation. He is also our firm's "ethics guy." He has studied the rules and provides an open door for consultation on any issue in professional ethics.

Shane lives his life well. He is a good friend. His family is very important to him. His

partners are important to him as are all he works with. He will leave an empty space at Worden Thane but he is so qualified for this position. I encourage you to consider his application and pass his name to Governor Bullock.

Sincerely,

Colleen M. Dowdall  
Attorney at Law



111 N. Higgins Ave., Suite 600

P.O. Box 4747

Missoula, MT 59806-4747

Phone: (406) 721-3400

Fax: (406) 721-6985

[www.wordenthane.com](http://www.wordenthane.com)

**From:** [Menzies, Lois](#)  
**To:** [Cook, Kevin](#)  
**Subject:** Vannatta -- Public Comment  
**Date:** Wednesday, March 25, 2015 8:59:03 PM

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**From:** Albrecht, Fran [mailto:Fran.Albrecht@providence.org]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 25, 2015 3:15 PM  
**To:** MT Supreme Court,  
**Subject:** Letter of support for Shane Vannatta as 4th Judicial District Judge

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Dear Members of the Judicial Nomination Commission,

I am delighted on behalf of our state, Missoula and Mineral counties that Shane Vannatta has chosen to be a candidate for the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial Judge. Perhaps now more than ever, our judicial court has the distinct opportunity to address key areas that will impact the future health and direction of our communities. Knowing the integrity, professionalism, objectivity and commitment of Shane Vannatta, he is undoubtedly an ideal candidate to serve as Judge.

I have known Shane for 18 years, first becoming acquainted when Shane was Chair of Leadership Missoula. With a vested interest in our community, Shane sought to support and shape future leaders through this program, volunteering his time to serve countless hours towards the program's success. I observed Shane's keen ability to facilitate constructive dialogue with integrity and meaningful candor as the class engaged in ethical debates over emotionally fueled community issues. As chair, he regularly underscored the critical importance of community engagement in this dialogue, regardless of perspective, and beautifully modeled respectful discourse towards resolution. This skillset is not easily taught and yet it comes naturally to Shane Vannatta.

Shane and I were also selected to serve on the Missoula Chamber Ambassadors, which is a small, select group of community leaders who are either past presidents of the Chamber or who are identified as a respected community leader. Shane was a natural to be selected, as he is respected not only by his industry peers, but is known to be a person of fairness, sound intelligent advisement, and genuine concern for his community, with a willingness to assist and follow through where needed. Once again, Shane accepted responsibility to provide input or solutions for challenging, often emotionally-charged issues or projects, leading the group to resolution while never losing sight of the best interest of the mission or overall intent.

I have been fortunate to call Shane a colleague and friend, as someone I trust for sound advice, support, integrity, compassion and reason. As the former executive director of Watson Children's Shelter serving abused, neglected and abandoned children of western Montana, I know firsthand of the critical importance of an informed, reasonable, accountable, invested, intelligent and

compassionate judge who has the capacity to positively affect the futures of families in crisis. I am confident with Shane in such a role. As a native Montanan from Great Falls, I am hopeful that your choice considers the uniqueness of our state and communities and ensures an objective candidate who is committed to the improvement of processes and the health of our Montana communities. Shane Vannatta embodies these attributes. As a member of the Montana University System Board of Regents, I am familiar with critical decisions with extremely complex issues and the importance of the ability to work effectively with others to ensure the best possible solution. Shane Vannatta possesses these qualities which are essential for this position.

Our ultimate candidate for 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District requires the skills, objectivity, temperament, initiative and investment to best serve Montanans and our challenging community needs. Not only does Shane have over 21 years of private practice experience representing individuals, small businesses, non-profits and large corporations, he understands and respects the challenges and the impact it has on members of our communities. I have no doubt that Shane would not only serve effectively and judiciously, he would make meaningful improvements for the betterment of all.

We will be incredibly fortunate to have Shane Vannatta elected as our next 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Judge of Missoula and Mineral Counties. I respectfully urge your consideration of Shane Vannatta for this position.

Sincerely,

*Fran*

Fran M. Albrecht, M.Ed.  
Executive Director  
Providence Montana Health Foundation

Regent  
Montana University System Board of Regents

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This message is intended for the sole use of the addressee, and may contain information that is privileged, confidential and exempt from disclosure under applicable law. If you are not the addressee you are hereby notified that you may not use, copy, disclose, or distribute to anyone the message or any information contained in the message. If you have received this message in error, please immediately advise the sender by reply email and delete this message.

**From:** [Menzies, Lois](#)  
**To:** [Cook, Kevin](#)  
**Subject:** Vannatta -- Public Comment  
**Date:** Wednesday, March 25, 2015 9:00:26 PM

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**From:** Richard A. Weber [mailto:RichardWeber@Montana.com]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 25, 2015 4:19 PM  
**To:** MT Supreme Court,  
**Subject:** Re Appointment of Shane Vannatta as 4th Judicial District Court Judge

To whom it may concern:

I support appointment of Shane Vannatta as district judge for the 4<sup>th</sup> judicial district of Montana. He is experienced in civil practice and is intelligent, competent and absolutely ethical. The citizens of the state and the 4<sup>th</sup> judicial will be well served by his appointment.

*Richard A. Weber, P.C.*  
*345 West Main Street*  
*Hamilton, MT 59840*  
*406-363-6888*

If you are a client or prospective client of Richard A. Weber, P.C. this message might be protected by the attorney-client privilege or otherwise confidential. Accordingly, don't share it with anyone without first asking Mr. Weber. If you are not a client, please disregard this warning. If you believe that you should not have received this message, please contact me immediately by replying to this email or calling me at 406/363-6888. Thank you.

**KALKSTEIN, JOHNSON & DYE, P.C.**

P.O. BOX 8568  
225 ADAMS  
MISSOULA, MT 59807-8568  
e-mail: [travis@kalksteinlaw.com](mailto:travis@kalksteinlaw.com)

Gary Kalkstein  
C. J. Johnson  
Travis Dye  
Helia Jazayeri  
Jennifer Loobey,  
Office Manager

(406) 721-9800  
FAX: (406) 721-9896

March 25, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P.O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005  
[mtsupremecourt@mt.gov](mailto:mtsupremecourt@mt.gov)

Re: Fourth Judicial District Judgeship  
Shane Vannatta

Members of the Judicial Nomination Commission:

I write this letter in support of Shane Vannatta's application for the open judicial position in Montana's Fourth Judicial District. Shane has many great qualities that would make him an excellent choice for district court judge, many of which can be seen in his application and in the numerous letters of support he has already received. There are a few qualities I believe are particularly important and would like to emphasize.

**1. Shane has significant civil experience.**

In the Fourth Judicial District, over 35% of the caseload is civil. Shane has represented individuals and businesses in civil proceedings for over 20 years. He is knowledgeable regarding the Rules of Civil Procedure, the Rules of Evidence, and many legal issues that arise in civil cases. Importantly, he also understands firsthand the expense involved in civil litigation and how delays in ruling on motions, scheduling hearings, and scheduling trials can affect individuals and businesses and lead to unnecessary fees and expenses being incurred. I am

confident that, as a judge, Shane will rule on motions and set hearings and trials expeditiously to ensure that all cases, whether civil or criminal, move through his court with minimal delay.

**2. Shane has experience as a judge.**

Shane has served as a judge *pro tem* in Missoula County Justice Court for over a decade. During this time he has handled both civil and criminal matters, including bench and jury trials. While the civil claims and criminal offenses in Justice Court may be considered less significant than those in District Court, the import to the litigants, whether civil or criminal, is the same. Thus, the skills and acumen required of a judge in Justice Court are the same as those that would be required of a judge in District Court.

A judge in Justice Court has significant direct contact with people appearing in court, many of whom appear *pro se*. Thus, a judge in Justice Court must be patient and able to explain confusing or complex legal issues in an easy-to-understand way. Shane has demonstrated these abilities. Likewise, a judge in Justice Court must be able to read and understand information and make judgments and decisions quickly. Shane has demonstrated these abilities, as well. Collectively, these abilities will serve Shane well as a district judge.

**3. Shane has a track record of public service and is always willing to help when needed.**

Among other public service, Shane has served as President of the State Bar, President of the Western Montana Bar Association, and often speaks at CLEs on a variety of topics. Most importantly, Shane is always willing to help out when asked, whether you want to run an idea or legal question by him, need help finding legal resources, or need someone to speak at a CLE. And when Shane cannot help, regardless of the reason, he gets you in touch with someone who can. This has made Shane an invaluable resource for lawyers in western Montana and beyond.

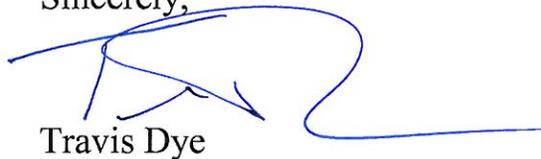
To summarize, I expect Shane will make an outstanding district court judge, as

Judicial Nomination Commission  
Re: Shane Vannatta  
March 25, 2015  
Page 3 of 3

he has the qualities all judges should have. He is intelligent, yet humble. He will be patient with litigants and lawyers, yet will move cases forward expeditiously. He will be fair, yet firm in his expectations. He will make fair, reasoned decisions in a timely manner. And, important to the burgeoning number of *pro se* litigants, he will be able to explain expectations, rulings, and other legal concepts in a way that everyone will understand. Thus, I urge you to forward Shane's name to Governor Bullock as a nominee for the position of district court judge for the Fourth Judicial District.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Travis Dye



# BOATWRIGHT LAW OFFICE, P.C.

JENNIFER B. LINT

March 25, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
c/o Loise Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
PO Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Sent via email to [MTsupremecourt@mt.gov](mailto:MTsupremecourt@mt.gov)

Re: Shane Vannatta, nominee for Fourth Judicial District Court Judge

Dear Commissioners:

“Call Shane.”

That is what I tell other attorneys every time we face a tough or confounding ethical issue. And by ethical issue, I do not mean just, how do we apply the Rules of Professional Conduct; I mean, truly, what is the best thing to do in a particular situation. He always takes time to take my calls, listens, and offers straightforward counsel, even if it is not what I wanted to hear. His understanding of the pressures of the practice of law and clients are skills essential to a trial court judge.

My first experience with Shane was when I was still a new attorney and had to file an action to enforce an easement. I filed the case on behalf of my client, and then I got a phone call from Shane, representing the offending party. It was one of those rare instances where my client was actually, completely right, and his actually, completely wrong. I had never met Shane, really did not even know he existed. He called, we spoke, and the case ended right there. What I learned from Shane is – pick up the phone. Communicate. Be straightforward about the issues (even if there is adversity of position). Recognize other lawyers, regardless of how wet behind the ears or long in the tooth, as your peers. Never personalize your client’s issues.

Nearly anyone with legal training can read statutes, apply case law and recite the facts given to us by the client, and Shane’s ability to do that will serve him well on the bench. What distinguishes Shane and makes him an excellent candidate is that rare quality: Judicial Temperament. All lawyers have judges we are happy to practice in front of, and those we would rather avoid. Shane’s compassionate approach, respect for the people and the process and extensive experience as a trial attorney will make him the type of judge lawyers want to practice before, and the type where clients will leave the courtroom feeling respected and that they were heard.

Shane's reputation for intelligent advocacy is region-wide. His lawyering skills and approachable personality are well respected in Ravalli County as well as his home county; and his years of community service in Missoula County demonstrate his connection to the non-legal community. Essential to maintaining Judicial Temperament is relationships and activities outside the law field, Shane's links to projects not related to the practice of law will foster that Temperament and keep him connected to Missoula County.

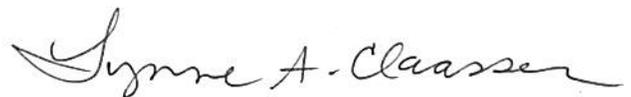
My assistant Lynne Claassen is endorsing this letter as well, although her comment is "I don't want to lose him as a lawyer!" Shane's regard for others involved in the legal process never ends at the lawyer, and has always treated my staff with the same respect as he affords me. Equality of treatment of those he came across while practicing will become equality of treatment of litigants, witnesses, and lawyers when Shane is the judge sitting on their case.

I look forward to seeing Shane on the bench, as he is unequivocally the best candidate for this position.

Sincerely,



Jennifer B. Lint



Lynne A. Claassen

# GANNETT LAW FIRM

Wells Fargo Center, Suite 1306 . 175 North 27<sup>th</sup> Street . Billings, Montana 59101  
Telephone 406/245-6330 . Fax 406/245-4416

DAMON L. GANNETT

Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 1375

Billings, Montana 59103

March 24, 2015

Judicial Nomination Commission  
C/O Lois Menzies  
Office of Court Administrator  
P. O. Box 203005  
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Re: 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Judgeship

Dear Sir or Madam:

This letter is being written in support of the selection of Shane A. Vannatta for the position of State District Court Judge for the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court of the State of Montana.

The undersigned is the American Bar Association Delegate to the House of Delegates of the American Bar Association. As the American Bar Association Delegate, the undersigned regularly attends the meetings of the Board of Trustees of the State Bar of Montana and the Mid-Year and Annual Meetings of the American Bar Association.

The undersigned initially met Shane A. Vannatta in 2003, while Shane was serving as a Trustee for Area B of the Board of Trustees of the State Bar of Montana. The Board of Trustees of the State Bar of Montana meets four (4) times a year, including a two (2) day annual retreat.

Shane is a past Chair of the Board of Trustees of the State Bar of Montana, and served as President of the State Bar of Montana from 2011 until 2012.

Shane is currently the State Bar Delegate to the House of Delegates of the American Bar Association. As the State Bar Delegate, Shane also attends the Mid-Year and Annual Meetings of the American Bar Association.

The Mid-Year Meetings of the American Bar Association usually consume approximately four (4) days each year. The Annual Meetings of the American Bar Association typically last approximately five (5) days each year. The undersigned spends extended periods of time with Shane during our mutual attendance at the Mid-Year and Annual meetings of the American Bar Association. Shane also attends the State Bar Board of Trustees' Meetings.

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Shane has been engaged in the private practice of law since September of 1993.

During the time that I have known Shane A. Vannatta, I have seen him deal with many complicated and delicate matters. Shane has consistently demonstrated his competency, thoroughness, diligence, objectivity and fairness in his participation in the analysis and handling of serious issues facing the legal profession on a state and national level. Shane is fair, thoughtful and contemplative. Shane exhibits a calm demeanor in his consideration of sensitive issues.

Shane's attention to detail is remarkable. He is persistent in his pursuit of the truth and the application of the law to each new situation that he encounters.

Shane has extensive experience in the practice of civil law. Shane is dedicated and perseveres in his pursuit of the resolution of the cases that he handles.

It is without any hesitation, or reservation whatsoever, that I recommend Shane A. Vannatta for your consideration for selection as the next District Court Judge for the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District of the State of Montana.

Please contact the undersigned with any questions, or requests for additional information, that you may have concerning the contents of this recommendation.

Your genuine consideration of the application of Shane A. Vannatta for appointment as a District Court Judge for the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District of the State of Montana is appreciated.

Sincerely,



Damon L. Gannett

DLG/bj

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