

Washington State Attorney General Bob Ferguson

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By Dann Mead Smith

On a rainy and windy fall day, the program opened with **Carolyn Hojaboom** sharing how she has been inspired by mentorship, both being mentored and being a mentor to others. **Todd Summerfelt** and **Trish Bostrom** led us in “Old Settler’s Song,” which was suggested years ago to be the official state song by Ivar Haglund.

Jan Levy introduced us to **Jim Stevens** of Morgan Stanley, a former Eagle Scout who grew up in Albany, New York, and spent time in Turkey before moving to the Northwest. He wants to join Rotary as it’s the “next step to be broadly engaged in the community.”



President Mark then introduced **Kathy Williams** and presented her with a Paul Harris Fellowship (times seven!) before she updated us on our Seattle Rotary Service Foundation that is “changing lives locally and around the world.” She reminded us that the foundation no longer just supports one large project a year and instead provides funding to several. The foundation’s annual report that lists each project that received funding was on the tables and can also be accessed via the link in today’s Totem. She mentioned we will be hearing from the “hard working service committees” over the coming weeks and concluded with, “thank you for making this a better world.”



President Mark introduced Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson as a “celebrity attorney that works for the state,” a dad of nine-year-old twins, a 4th generation Washingtonian, and a chess master who is a two-time state champion! President Mark said that it’s important as Americans to understand that “we are a nation of laws...this is why Attorney General Ferguson is here today.”

Attorney General Ferguson mentioned that this is his 101st speech as AG before a Rotary club. He “loves Rotaries and the different

perspectives he receives from around the state” and how Rotarians are “helping folks in their communities.”

The main theme of his office and his role as Attorney General is “independence.” He needs “to do excellent legal work but he needs to be trusted as independent,” and we have “a long tradition of independence in our state’s Attorney General’s office.” He provided the example of how former Attorney General Rob McKenna kept most of Christine Gregoire’s deputies and how he kept many of McKenna’s key staff, which he said was unique among the states. “Coming from a place of independence is the hallmark of their office.”

He explained how the office is organized and the focus of the Attorney General’s work:

- When the state is the client and they give legal advice to state agencies and officials.
- The second is when his office takes on cases directly on behalf of the people. In this case, the client is all of us as citizens of Washington.



He highlighted a couple of key cases that his office is working on, including the opioid epidemic lawsuit against Purdue Pharmaceuticals which makes OxyContin, the President’s “travel ban,” and the DACA/Dreamers suit. He said that each case has “a lot at stake - real people with real lives being dramatically impacted” and that it has an impact on the rule of law.

He has filed 17 lawsuits against the Trump administration, though he says he does not take lightly when suing the President, and has won all four that have been heard so far. He said he wished he did not need to file as many lawsuits, but that it is important.

He said, “politics and the tone of the debate is tough now,” but he is hopeful that when “the courts weigh in that it helps people move on.” He concluded that he is an optimist even though this is a challenging time for the country, but that he has “confidence in our institutions.”

He answered questions on:

- *Does he work on issues that are not just important to the Puget Sound area, but also Eastern Washington?* He mentioned his suit on behalf of Hanford workers against the Obama Administration over nuclear waste treatment, and that the opioid and Dreamers issues impact the entire state.
- *How does he decide which cases to take on?* He said, “prioritizing can be a challenge” so he asks three questions: “Are Washingtonians being harmed? Do I have standing to bring this lawsuit? Do we have good legal arguments?”
- *What are his thoughts on safe injection sites?* He said he can’t speak to the legality of it at this time.
- *On Title IX issues?* It’s premature to comment on it, we need “to see what the administration does so there is no legal action yet; he is monitoring it.”
- *And on the Hirst state Supreme Court decision?* His office has given legal advice to lawmakers that request it, but he does not weigh in on policy issues that have been decided by the courts; just legal advice.

Don’t miss next week’s meeting as we celebrate World Polio Day! As President Mark said, “we are this close (with only 11 polio cases reported this year), due to the people in this room.”