

Tayloe takes oath of office as new district court judge

Written by Malinda Rust - Lawton Constitution
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Friday afternoon wasn't the first time former District Judge Allen McCall has asked Comanche County District Court Judge Emmit Tayloe to repeat an oath after him, but it was the first time the former judge gave something away to the longtime defense attorney — the seat in his former courtroom.

Gov. Mary Fallin appointed Tayloe to the judgeship position earlier this month following a rigorous selection process initiated by McCall's September retirement, and even though Tayloe was officially sworn in Tuesday — a substantial caseload demanded immediate action — a formal ceremony to celebrate Tayloe's addition to a team of judges that "laid the foundation" for such a finely-tuned courthouse was held Friday afternoon.

McCall, who married Tayloe and his wife, Dolina, 29 years ago, said he was honored when Tayloe asked him to read his judicial oath before a crowd of family, friends, legal professionals, law enforcement officers, former classmates and local and state representatives.

"We've been six and a half months without a judge and to say it's been challenging is an understatement," Presiding District Court Judge Mark Smith said, thanking everyone from court clerks to prosecutors who have all chipped in to help keep the wheels of justice turning during the judicial selection process. Aside from the immediate relief Tayloe's swearing-in provided to court officials, Smith said, Friday was "a special day, a great day, a happy day."

Tayloe's first items of business this week have been conducted in a hand-me-down robe with the initials, "J.B." in the back.

"This is the robe that was worn by (former district court judge) Jack Brock," Tayloe said. "He was a legend in this courthouse. He taught me how to practice law, he taught me how to practice law right."

Tayloe said it seemed fitting for McCall, who took over after Brock's 28 years of service ended, to administer his oath as the ultimate "passing of the torch." The robe, however, was an

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unexpected detail that had been hanging in McCall's closet.

"He took over for Judge Brock and he's now passing the torch to me. ... I take that very seriously," Taylor said. "I hope I can hold a candle to the torch that you're handing me."

McCall said he couldn't think of a better person to take the torch, and shared his notes from his interview with the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation (background checks are involved in the selection process) about what "this new judge" was like.

"Can I still object?" Taylor joked.

McCall said Taylor is "the total package" — unquestionable honesty and integrity with a strong work ethic and experience.

"He's got excellent judicial temperament," McCall said. "He's been a lawyer for 30 years and I don't believe I've ever seen Emmitt lose his temper. He always handles things expeditiously, and efficiently at the same time he keeps his cool, even when things go against him."

Taylor, he said, has strong values but is always willing to listen to all viewpoints in order to make decisions that are "firm but fair."

"One of the things that I think is most important for a judge, especially in this courthouse, is that the team always comes first," Mc-Call said. "That means your individual thoughts about how things ought to go have to come second to what's best for everybody including the lawyers and the litigants."

The only weakness? "Maybe a little too nice," McCall wrote in his notes.

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“This is a great place to work. ... I’m certainly aware of what I left behind up here, but I think Emmitt’s going to make this a better courthouse. I really do,” McCall said.

Tony Allison, former director of Cameron University’s Communication Department, was also present Friday to show support for Tayloe — a national parliamentary debate champion. Quite a few of Allison’s former students and competitors — many present Friday — have experienced various successes in professional fields, and he’s thrilled each time.

“I treated them like they were like my own sons and daughters,” Allison said. “(Emmitt’s) so honest, he’s going to be an amazing judge.” Tayloe expressed thanks to those in attendance, especially his “absolute rock,” his wife, and fellow judges, especially his predecessor.

“I’ve got a lot of respect for you, and I hope after the years go by you can look at me and say, I’m still glad I gave you that torch,” Tayloe told McCall.



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