

# THE DURANGO HERALD

## Risberg outdoes Wasley in DA race

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In the race for district attorney, where campaigns were defined by an alternative-justice approach versus traditional law-and-order, Todd Risberg soundly defeated Russell Wasley.

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Photo by YODIT GIDEY/Herald  
Family and friends of Todd Risberg cheer at Cuckoo's Chicken House & Waterin' Hole on Tuesday night.

Risberg, a Durango attorney, won 61 percent of the 24,179 votes cast in La Plata County, compared with his Republican challenger Wasley's 39 percent. In San Juan County, Risberg won 70 percent of the votes. In Archuleta County, Wasley had a slight lead with 792 votes to Risberg's 714 votes. The Archuleta County totals were as of 10:25 p.m. and represented unofficial early votes only.

"It's a great day for this county, this district and this country," Risberg said. "It's bigger than me."

The 6th Judicial District Attorney earns about \$90,000 and manages a \$1.8 million budget and 25 employees. Beginning next year, the minimum pay for district attorneys statewide will increase to \$100,000, and the salary will increase by \$10,000 each year for three years

thereafter.

Risberg, 44, plans to rely on programs that rehabilitate alcohol and drug offenders rather than insist on jail or prison sentences. He also plans to use restorative-justice programs that allow offenders and victims to resolve their conflicts in a mediated session rather than in a courtroom.

Risberg said the voters have signaled they want change, and he intends to honor their requests.

"I plan to do what I've said we're going to do," Risberg said. "We're going to change how things work.

"I appreciate everybody caring and paying attention and voting," he added.

Wasley, a deputy district attorney in the 6th Judicial District, said the negative campaigning at the local and national level has been tiring, and he is sure voters and candidates are happy that the election season is concluded.

"To have tried and lost is better than to have never tried at all," Wasley said. "Running for office is a time-consuming and tiring process."

During debates, Wasley advocated traditional prosecution, where prison is used as a deterrent and victims' rights are paramount.

Risberg, a Minnesota native, graduated from the University of Colorado Law School in 1994, worked for a judge in Jefferson County for a year, and worked for two years as a civil litigator in Denver.

He moved to Durango in 1998 and worked as a 6th Judicial District prosecutor for two years. In 2001, he was appointed as San Juan County judge in Silverton, a part-time position. During that time, he also worked

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as a special prosecutor for the Southern Ute Indian Tribe. He resigned the judgeship in 2007, and since then has been in private practice as a defense lawyer.

In his private practice, Risberg successfully defended the owners of Orio's Roadhouse against the statewide smoking ban. Last year, he was appointed by the court to defend Derrick Nelson Begaye, who was found not guilty of murder in the death of Nicole Redhorse but guilty of three sexual assault charges.

Durango voter Ellen Stein said Risberg has progressive views aimed at rehabilitating offenders and cutting back on the number of non-violent offenders sent to jail.

"I like his position on working with people to reduce recidivism," Stein said. "There's a whole prison industry that is going nowhere but feeding corporations."

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