

Williamson County Court Docket Session (10.6.15)

By: Kyle Rearden from [The Last Bastille blog](#)

October 9th, 2015



Both criminal and civil law nicely compliment the libertarian duality of the non-aggression principle and the self-ownership axiom. [As Michael Dean has said](#), the only two rules in life are to abstain from initiating force and to keep your word; in other words, don't hurt anybody and honor your contracts. Unfortunately, ever since [the State](#) has assumed a coercive monopoly on the provision of adjudication services, this has resulted in the pernicious evils of statist "[family law](#)," as expressed in a series of related grievances by the [Divorce Corp](#) documentary (besides the reformist "[men's rights activists](#)"), which has inexorably led me to advocate for [a purely private law society](#).

According to the [Williamson County Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports](#), judicial expenses have increased alongside property taxes. Between FY 2012 – 2014, county revenue from property taxes has increased by \$16,490,649, despite the fact that as a percentage of total revenue, property taxes have dropped by over 7%. During this same period, judicial expenses have increased by \$2,535,397, despite that as a percentage of total expenditures, judicial expenses have dropped by about 0.5%. What this appears to suggest is that although other sources of both revenue and expenditures have made up for the proportional drop in property taxes and judicial expenses, the fact of the matter is that the Williamson County government is pilfering more wealth through property taxes and spending more of that loot on its judiciary.

Considering this burden upon the poor sap taxpayers ([court costs](#), notwithstanding), I opted to discover how these adjudication services were being provided. Upon examining the various dockets through the county's "[records inquiry](#)" system, I chose to attend a batch of cases scheduled before the [425th District Court](#), which specializes in family law. Having never attended a civil court proceeding of any kind, this would be a rather unique change for me since it would be a good contrast to my previous fieldtrip at the [Austin Municipal Court](#), and unlike the misleadingly titled, "[commissioner's court](#)," which is a legislative body, the 425th District Court is actually part of the county government's judicial branch.

Arriving and parking in Georgetown was, for the most part, remarkably easy. Traffic in the morning was headed mostly southbound, so after crossing over the interstate, it was relatively smooth sailing. All I had to do was find a spot in the overflow parking lot, and much like a week ago when I attended the [Williamson County Commissioner's Court meeting](#), I only ended up driving around the block simply because I was unfamiliar with those particular streets. Parking near the judicial courthouse was much like that three-hour free parking space at the non-judicial "courthouse" in its painlessness.

Security, on the other hand, more closely resembled Austin's municipal court than Williamson's "commissioner's court." Despite emptying my pockets into a small container, placing my messenger bag on the X-ray conveyer, and stepping through the metal detector, I ended up getting wanded. Ordered by the wandling officer to take off my belt, I was rewanded, and once I got waved on through, I reassembled myself before I approached the court information desk and learned where both the 425th District courtroom and the bathroom were, which, interestingly enough, turned out to be right across the hall from each other on the ground floor.

Whether I was in the hallway or the courtroom, nearly everyone I saw was formally dressed in business suits. Unlike last week's "commissioner's court" meeting where only the corporate lapdog press bothered to dress formally at all, virtually everyone in this actual courthouse was formally dressed. I don't know whether they were taking the [rules of court](#) too literally, or if it was just a simply the case that the lawyers outnumbered the sheer number of plaintiffs and defendants combined, but there was very much a sense of taking greater pride in one's professionalism that was lacking at the municipal court.

That being said, the attitude of the nearly everyone in the courtroom was convivial, almost jovial in their banter while we were all waiting for Judge Betsy Lambeth to grace us with her presence. Considering that this was essentially a divorce court, in part according to several cases on the docket, I was a bit mystified about this, to say the least. The social atmosphere was completely the opposite of the dreary municipal court; apparently, traffic and narcotics violations are costly headaches whereas divorces and child custody hearings are a recipe for a good time. Hell, I'd go so far as to say that the whole vibe was noticeably more lighthearted than even last week's "commissioner's court" meeting.

The décor itself was quite different from the municipal court, and much more similar to the "commissioner's court," at least in some ways. These bench seats were more comfortable because the padding was better than the bench seats at the municipal court, and the backrests were sloped back, instead of being vertically straight, as they were at the "commissioner's court." This courtroom actually **looked** like a courtroom, especially with the wooden railing separating the public seating from the defense and plaintiff tables, unlike courtroom 2A at Austin municipal. Maybe it's all due to the wider room width and wood paneling, despite the fact that it was a windowless courtroom.

After sitting for 20 minutes, the bailiff announced the arrival of Judge Lambeth, who much like Judge Ruiz, started noticeably late. In partially mimicking Ruiz, all that we had to do was rise and then sit down when Lambeth entered, and then again later when she went into her chambers

with Howton's attorneys. There was, thankfully, minimal worshipping of Leviathan, since there was no praying or [pledging to multiple flags](#).

First up were a bunch of apparently one-sided divorce cases. Beard went first, approached the bench, testified under oath to her attorney in front of Lambeth, whom summarily granted the divorce. Martin went up next, and followed what became a predictable formula; a few moments later, both a name change and divorce was granted by Lambeth. It was at this point I chided myself for not sitting up at the front where I could hear more easily what was being said, since only Lambeth was the only actor speaking into a PA. Kleiger then went up (this time the plaintiff being a man), and was similarly granted his divorce; checking my watch once Kleiger finished, it had been only four minutes since the bailiff announced Lambeth's arrival.

Lambeth was apparently still going through the 8:30 am docket, despite the fact that it was closer to 9 o'clock by this point. After Small was sworn in, Lambeth questioned her without an attorney being present, mainly focusing on issues of property and children, which were negligible; Lambeth, much like the earlier ones, granted the divorce, yet told Small to file the divorce with the clerk. Before I forget, Lambeth kept wishing the new divorcees "good luck" once she granted said divorces; I seriously can't remember the last time any government employee wished me "good luck" with any fucking thing, **ever**.

Concluding the 8:30 docket past 9, a couple was simultaneously sworn in. They were petitioning Lambeth to permit a name change for their, presumably, adopted child. Lambeth, a judge who seemingly isn't hesitant to rubber stamp whatever is asked of her, at least this morning, granted the name change.

Keep in mind that unlike Austin municipal, this county courtroom had more people by at least a factor of five. I counted heads at least three times, and there were twenty-five, which included a half-dozen court employees and attorneys. There was also an intuitive feeling I had about these legal proceedings that they were much more like a conveyor belt or assembly line, in that what I was being a pragmatic witness to was nothing more romantic going on here than simply going through the motions of legalistic formalities.

Roll call for the 9:00 docket was conducted after the adopted child's name change was granted. Richwine, Menchaca,, Howton, Jamison, Allgood, Seggern, Dern, and Isbell were all present and accounted for (except for Illes, who was absent), although sometimes the attorneys asked Lambeth for continuances ranging anywhere from 10 minutes to two hours, depending on whether their client was on a different floor going through a legal proceeding on an unrelated matter; for instance, Seggern needed a two hour continuance due to a drug testing issue. Interestingly enough, a few of the attorneys there were representing multiple clients; Howton and Jamison had the same attorney, whereas Allgood and Dern each had the same attorney who, if I understood correctly, was acting on behalf of one of the parties in one case, whereas in the other he was playing the opposite role, although damned if I could figure out which was which.

The Richwire couple was called up first, and all parties passed through the wooden rails, with the couple being sworn in. Lambeth was told by Mrs. Richwire that her sister was an irresponsible little shit who effectively abandoned her daughter, in large part due to her transient scrapes with

the government police; the biological father was incarcerated, and the biological mother was on felony parole. According to Mrs. Richwire, she is a stay-at-home mother, she and her husband [homeschool](#) their children, and that the issue at play here is whether her sister's parental rights should be terminated due to abandonment, despite multiple failed attempts to "get her back on her feet." There was a lot more detail to Mrs. Richwire's testimony, but the long and short of it was that Judge Lambeth terminated her sister's parental rights, and then the Richwires were told that they are required to come back to court for the adoption ceremony that **all** of their children must attend.

Following Richwire's lengthy proceeding, the next few cases went through the meat-grinder fairly smoothly. Allgood's case might just have gone sideways, since one of the parties was not present, so the motion to transfer the case, presumably in terms of venue or even quite possibly jurisdiction, was subsequently denied, thereby justifying the validity of the divorce itself. Jamison's motion for further temporary orders was reset (rescheduled), despite the fact that the issue at play was whether or not he deserved unsupervised visitation with his children. Richard Isbell mentioned he had paid approximately \$2,000 in medical expenses for his children, in addition to what Lambeth said was his monthly child support payments of \$457, to which Mr. Isbell claimed it was in excess of \$600; he seemed most interested in expressing to Judge Lambeth that the child support bureaucrats got their records reflected accurately, because if they didn't, then (he claimed) they wouldn't permit him to satisfy his child support obligation if the dollar amount was over 50% of his income, which he said it just might be, depending on how it was calculated.

Rounding all of this out was Dern being currently "upstairs" about another matter, and then Lambeth declaring a recess in order to confer with Howton's attorneys in her chambers. Taking that as my cue, I decided to make my own exit right at the beginning of the recess. It was while I was walking back to my car that I remembered Murray Rothbard's observation that "[the State has been warring with parents for control over their children](#)," mainly due to the legal doctrine of *parens patriae*, whereby Leviathan presumes to be the ultimate parent of all the children within its territorial boundaries.

What I learned from this political fieldtrip is that any monopoly on the provision of adjudication services, even if constitutional, does not therefore automatically respect human liberty. Some federal courts have outright promoted [alternative dispute resolution](#) as a way to ease their caseloads; since economists already know that with competition, costs go down while quality goes up, then why can't we expect something similar in terms of court costs and the satisfaction of justice? Although some patriots might content that "[justice is not for sale](#)," the fact of the matter is that *it is already for sale*, and so the question at this point becomes, do you want to have an abusive monopoly or a free market in the production of justice? [As Gustave de Molinari cautioned](#):

"If, on the contrary, the consumer is not free to buy security where he pleases, you forthwith see open up a large profession dedicated to arbitrariness and bad management. **Justice becomes slow and costly**, the police vexatious, individual liberty is no longer respected, the price of security is abusively inflated and inequitably apportioned,

according to the power and influence of this or that class of consumers. The protectors engage in bitter struggles to wrest customers from one another. In a word, all the abuses inherent in monopoly or in communism crop up.” [Emphasis added]

How wouldn't Molinari's warning not also be applicable to the government judiciary? Perhaps the time has come for the Texas family law courts to lower the barriers to entry for the market privatization of adjudication. Then again, maybe couples could just avoid the whole mess of the family law courts altogether by exercising their individual right to contract in a variety of creative ways.