

# Tampa Bay Times

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## Pasco Clerk of Court Jed Pittman defends work ethic



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NEW PORT RICHEY — Pasco Clerk of the Court Jed Pittman said he doesn't spend much time at his office, doesn't know how many hours he works, seldom visits the county seat in Dade City and made his staff take on some of the duties he used to do himself.

And he makes no apologies for his work habits.

In fact, Pittman boasted that he's still pretty good at his \$136,576 a year job:

"I haven't had any complaints from the public."



The clerk is entrusted with Pasco's most important records. For 32 years voters have kept him in office.

But he hasn't exactly kept office hours.

For the past two years, Joseph Edward Pittman has kept, shall we say, a nontraditional work schedule.

At age 66, he blames it on age, weight, illness and injury. His body is failing him, Pittman said, but his mind is not.

Even nearing the end of his eighth and last term, he said he won't retire early. He said he can still do the job.

Pittman said he can still run a \$28-million operation with six offices and 385 employees, even on the days when he can't even walk.

"There's nothing wrong with my head," he said. "... I'm still the clerk, I'm still running the clerk's office and I think I'm doing a pretty good job for the people of Pasco County.

"I hope they appreciate it."

...

A recent report by WTSP-Ch. 10 criticized Pittman's work schedule and the fact that for nine years he's drawn a

pension check on top of his salary.

To be sure, Pittman criticized that report and its assertions.

He is among more than 200 elected officials in Florida taking advantage of a state law allowing them to "double dip" — to draw retirement benefits but remain on the job.

But Pasco County Commissioners Ann Hildebrand and Pat Mulieri are doing the same thing, too.

Pittman once got \$362,687 in deferred compensation and now gets another \$6,242 a month — on top of his salary.

The TV station also said an unnamed employee told them that the clerk just "pops in and pops out."

So Pittman agreed to meet with the *St. Petersburg Times* on Thursday to discuss his work habits.

It did not begin well.

His motorized scooter had a flat tire. Pittman limped the 50 feet from his county-owned Chevrolet Suburban to his office door.

Then Pittman asked a *Times* photographer to leave. He did not want to be photographed for this story.

"It's my office," he said.

Then he was asked about his medical condition.

"Ever heard of the HIPAA act?" he said.

That's the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996. It's a federal law that protects private medical information.

But Pittman soon relented.

### **Physical limitations**

He started with the knees.

Pittman said his health was already in decline two years ago when he stepped in a hole and hurt his knees in the West Pasco Judicial Center parking lot.

He tore the meniscus, or cartilage, in both knees. They've never been fixed.

"The pain is very excruciating when I try to walk," he said. "Getting up from this table will not be fun."

He has diabetes. Already heavy, he's gained even more weight.

He said he has other medical problems. They prevent him from taking anything stronger than Tylenol, and they make surgery risky.

That's why his knees can't be fixed, why he can't exercise and why he can't lose weight.

He lives in pain. He has trouble breathing. He can walk, but barely. He has fallen several times. He's only as mobile as his motorized scooter will let him be.

"There are days when I just can't be here," Pittman said. "I can't walk. I can't get around my own house."

He's basically "handicapped," Pittman said.

"I consider myself to be a physically challenged person," he said. "I'm crippled."

### **Abbreviated hours**

So began his nontraditional schedule. It wasn't a plan of any kind. It just sort of evolved over time.

"I was very frank with my staff," he said. "... I told them and said, 'Look, I'm a cripple. You're going to have to help me out here a little bit.' "

His subordinates have taken on more of his meetings, Pittman said. He cut his travel to professional and legislative functions. He often communicates with his staff by phone.

"It gets to the point where I have days that I cannot get up, I just cannot work," he said. "On those days I get to use Mr. Bell's invention."

Pittman uses videoconferencing to talk to satellite offices. He said he doesn't get out to Dade City much.

"As far as I know he makes all the significant decisions in the office," said the attorney for the clerk of the court, Dennis Alfonso. "He's the one who makes all the final decisions."

Pittman said he has no idea what his work schedule will be until he wakes up that morning:

"I know when I can't walk, when I go to get up and the pain shoots up my legs and I'm holding the corner of my bed so I don't fall down."

But he said that's no reason to leave office early:

"It's not something I need to retire about. I am doing my job. I haven't had any complaints from anybody, no 'You're doing a terrible job, Jed, you need to change.' "

### **No need to unbuckle**

Then there's the mobile office.

Several of Pasco's constitutional officers drive taxpayer-bought vehicles. Last year Pittman asked the County Commission to let him get rid of his 2005 Suburban so he could buy a new one. It didn't provide the back support he needed, he said. So the commission let him get a new one at a cost of more than \$30,000.

Pittman looked out a window of the conference room Thursday, pointed at a Mini Cooper parked across from the new Suburban and laughed. He can't fit in a sedan or anything smaller.

"I wanted a good, safe car," he said. "And I am a fat guy"

He acknowledged that he regularly conducts business from inside the sport utility vehicle. He said it's a habit from long ago: He used to let auditors take over his office while he worked from his car.

He'll park in his reserved spot at the New Port Richey courthouse and have his work brought out to him. He'll even have meetings inside the Suburban.

"If I can't walk into the office," he said, "I park out here. I can sign my documents. I can talk to my staff. I can make my calls."

Pittman could not say how much work time he spends in the vehicle. He said his work hours are split into even thirds between home, office and SUV.

"Do I want to stay in that car out there?" Pittman said. "Heck no, I want to be in my office."

"You can't get a lot of people in those cars. It's not that comfortable."

### No apologies

So how many hours does Pittman work?

"I don't know," Pittman told a *Times* reporter. "Do you track yours?"

Pittman said he doesn't keep track. But he said his is not a 40-hour-a-week job, either. He and his top staff are on call 24-7.

State law, according to Pittman, says the chief judge can replace the clerk of the court after an unexplained absence of 60 days. But Pittman said he works every day — he just can't say for how long.

"The clerk is paid daily," he said. "That's all I have to say."

He also said he hasn't taken a vacation in 12 years.

But are there any shortcomings from all these unusual work arrangements?

"I've seen none," Pittman said.

He said his access to the public hasn't been curtailed, either:

"If you want to see me, make an appointment."

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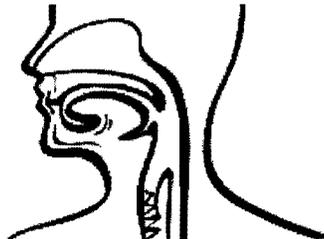
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