

DENVER AND THE WEST

Colorado coroners' races growing ever closer to controversy

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An excerpt from the above article:

Debating the duties

Perhaps the most closely watched race is Arapahoe County's, pitting Jay Ledbetter, an attorney, against Dobersen.

Ledbetter accused Dobersen of mismanaging the office, of running a private business on the side, even of doing too many autopsies.

"I think a day-to-day management of the office is not occurring," Ledbetter said. "I think he is bound up in doing what he knows how to do very well, which is autopsies. And that's why he does something like six times the national average of autopsies."

Not true, Dobersen said. Yes, he performs autopsies for other counties, with the agreement of the Arapahoe County commissioners. And he questioned the charge that he performs too many autopsies.

"I'm paid the same salary whether I do 10 autopsies a year or 1,000," he said. "I do autopsies as they're medically indicated. You can't just come in and say you're going to cut the number of autopsies when they're needed."

Ledbetter was also forced to retract the assertion that Dobersen's staff "manipulates evidence" in trials rather than admit an error.

He acknowledged that his allegation was a mistake, blaming it on bad information from a source he trusted.

"Either he told me wrong — you know, I'm a professional listener, I listen well — or I didn't hear it right," Ledbetter said. "So I'm going to accept partial responsibility."

Dobersen said, "If I did something wrong, I'd expect it, but when I'm accused of something that realistically should put me in jail — certainly out of public office — it becomes personal."