

Editorial: Duty requires Egan to assist in smooth transition to Smittcamp

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By The Bee Editorial Board

When it became clear Tuesday night that Lisa Sondergaard Smittcamp would win the hotly contested race for Fresno County district attorney over three-term incumbent Elizabeth Egan, supporters at her election party erupted in cheers.

Among those supporters were Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer, Fresno Police Officers Association President Jacky Parks and prosecutors and investigators from Egan's staff.

Their elation was understandable. It's relatively rare for an incumbent district attorney to be voted out of office, and for prosecutors and high-profile members of law enforcement to publicly back the challenger.

But the time for celebrating is over. Everyone in Fresno County's judicial and law-enforcement systems must get back to the hard work of arresting, jailing, prosecuting and defending those individuals accused of crimes.

Egan is the district attorney for the next six months. She will need the respect and cooperation of her staff, as well as their best efforts, to perform the job that she was elected three times to do: see that justice is served by prosecuting crimes in an ethical and efficient manner.

The door swings both ways in this compact, however. Egan and her top staff must not engage in retribution against prosecutors, investigators and members of law enforcement who supported Smittcamp. Egan must accept that the voters have spoken and do everything in her power to work professionally and cordially with Smittcamp to make the transition to a new district attorney as smooth as possible.

Smittcamp offered many criticisms of the DA's office and made many promises during her campaign.

Among the pledges: better training for young prosecutors, expediting cases to reduce early jail releases, working to establish a veterans court, bringing back the DA's School Attendance Review Board Unit, prosecuting recyclers who knowingly purchase stolen materials, and being more transparent to the public.

We don't expect Smittcamp to fulfill these promises overnight. But we will hold her accountable for giving maximum effort to see these and other initiatives, such as timely, thorough investigations of officer-involved shootings, realized during her first term.

Most of all, we expect her to live up to her campaign mantra of being "smart and tough" on crime.

As Tuesday's result indicated, Fresno County voters were looking for someone to take the DA's office in a new direction.