

Fresno judicial candidate Lisa Gamoian missed voting for 10 years, election records say

By Pablo Lopez



Lisa Gamoian SPECIAL TO THE FRESNO BEE

Lisa Gamoian, one of two candidates seeking to become a Fresno County judge, missed voting for 10 years and just re-registered this year, Fresno County Election Office records reveal.

Before the June primary, Gamoian last voted in the November 2004 general election, the records say.

"I have no excuse for not doing it," Gamoian said Friday, other than "I get so consumed with work that I didn't get around to it."

Her opponent, Rachel Hill, has missed six elections out of 13 since November 2004.

Hill said she also has a busy life. "Overall, I think I have a pretty good voting record," she said.

In the county's lone judicial race, Gamoian and Hill are facing off in the Nov. 4 election after beating three other candidates in the June primary.

Gamoian bills herself as Fresno's No. 1 homicide prosecutor; Hill is a former prosecutor turned defense attorney and adjunct law professor. They are seeking to replace Judge Robert H. Oliver, who is retiring after nearly 20 years of service.

The term is for six years. The position pays about \$178,000 a year.

The Bee turned up the voting records while doing research for candidate profiles. A check of voter rolls showed that Gamoian had registered to vote on Jan. 31 this year, and the county Elections Office responded to a Bee request with records of each candidate's recent voting history.

Voting history is a public record, but the way a person votes isn't.

The records show Hill and Gamoian both voted in the June primary by absentee ballot. The records also show that Gamoian has voted in 10 elections since 1992 and Hill has voted in 13 elections since 1996.

But for the past 10 years, Gamoian has been missing from the voter rolls.

Gamoian said she's been busy with murder trials, including the case of Marcus Wesson, who was given the death penalty in 2005 for orchestrating the murders of nine of his children in Fresno. She also was caring for her ailing dad, who died two years ago. In addition, she was responsible for running her family's raisin farm in Selma.

She said she was surprised to learn in January that she wasn't registered to vote. "When I went to file my papers, the Elections Office informed me," she said.

Gamoian said she initially had her ballots mailed to her home in Selma. Because of death threats associated with her job, Gamoian said she decided around 2004 to have her ballots sent to her work mailing address at the Fresno County District Attorney's Office. She said she never received a ballot at her office but was too busy to inquire why that was happening.

"I thought once you were registered, you were registered," Gamoian said. "But they told me I was unregistered because my mail was undeliverable." Election officials confirm Gamoian's voter registration became inactive in 2005 as a result of undeliverable mail.

In the highly competitive race, both candidates have a campaign consultant, a sizable treasury and dozens of well-known endorsements. Both are committed to public safety and public service and promise to work long hours to help unplug an overburdened court system.

Hill said she was surprised that Gamoian hadn't voted in a decade. She noted that the District Attorney's Office is close to the Elections Office.

The election records provided to the Bee say Hill received absentee ballots for the June 2012 presidential primary and the February 2008 presidential primary, but each time Hill did not return her ballot to be counted. The records don't show other elections she missed. But County Clerk Brandi Orth said Hill did not vote in four other elections.

Hill said she doesn't remember why she missed the elections but recalled being back East to care for her mother during at least two elections. "I voted as often as I could," she said. "I think I have a pretty consistent record of voting."

Fresno attorney Anthony Capozzi, a political analyst who has endorsed neither candidate, said Gamoian's voting record will "clearly create a serious campaign issue."

"How serious can someone for political office be if they don't even vote in the last 10 years?" Capozzi said.

The candidates

Lisa Gamoian

Age/background: 56, born in Selma, the daughter of a raisin farmer, single.

Education: Graduate of Fresno State and Hastings Law School in San Francisco.

Career highlights: Has worked for the Fresno County District Attorney's Office for 24 years and has tried more than 30 murder cases. She is best known for prosecuting Marcus Wesson, who received the death penalty for orchestrating the 2004 murder of nine of his children in Fresno. Her work earned her Prosecutor of the Year in 2006 by the California District Attorney's Association.

Rachel Hill

Age/background: 51, born in New York, married to Fresno County Superior Court Judge Jonathan Skiles.

Education: Graduate of University of Notre Dame Law School.

Career highlights: Prosecutor for the Fresno County District Attorney's Office for 10 years before working as a county and federal public defender and at the San Joaquin College of Law. She also has worked for McCormick, Barstow, Sheppard, Wayte & Carruth in Fresno, one of the largest law firms in the central San Joaquin Valley.

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