

The Bee recommends: Rachel Hill best candidate for judge

By The Fresno Bee Editorial Board



The Bee recommends Rachel Hill for judge.

AP FILE

The criminal justice system is one of the most contentious issues in the Valley. The early release of prisoners from the underfunded Fresno County jail infuriates people at every step of the system. Angry voices are raised daily at the injustice: from the teen whose car was stolen by a 10-time loser to the police officers, who rightfully feel frustrated when they see suspects they have chased down on foot released from jail and back on the street before the paperwork is finished.

Among the reasons for many suspects being set free too soon is a clogged court system. That is why the selection of an excellent person to fill a rare open seat on the judicial bench is critical.

In the June primary, The Bee recommended two highly qualified candidates for the Fresno County Superior Court Judge Seat No. 15 and they prevailed: Rachel Hill and Lisa Gamoian.

On balance, Hill is the better candidate in a fierce race. We believe she will take a broader approach on the bench and be a stronger advocate for progress that would reduce jail crowding and the backlog in the courts.

Hill stands out from her opponent with a wise view of the justice system – seeing that the guilty not just be convicted but that sentencing reflect cutting-edge, evidence-based programs that can help inmates leave the system with the ability to become productive citizens. Recidivism and endless prison construction is evidence of a failing system, a

waste of humanity and tax money. She is educated about the power of specialty courts that have good results with defendants with substance abuse, mental health and veterans issues. She cites the strong record of tools like restorative justice to change outcomes for good.

A 51-year-old native of New York, she worked her way through college, graduating with honors from the University of Notre Dame Law School. She has both public and private experience, acting as a prosecutor for the Fresno County District Attorney's Office for a decade, and later working as a county and federal public defender.

She acquired her experience in civil litigation working for McCormick, Barstow, Sheppard, Wayte and Carruth in Fresno, among the largest firms in the Valley. She is a professor at San Joaquin College of Law, teaching criminal law and juvenile justice. She also taught constitutional law and legal ethics at Fresno City College.

She names more than two dozen judges among her supporters and uses as her slogan the fact that she never lost a jury trial. The sitting Judge Robert H. Oliver, who retires in January, is endorsing her, along with former U.S. District Court Judge Oliver Wanger.

Lisa Gamoian is an award-winning homicide prosecutor in the District Attorney's office, well-known for her prosecution of mass murderer Marcus Wesson in 2005. She teaches police cadets and deputy DAs statewide and operates a raisin farm in Selma.

The amount of money being spent in this race is absurd. More than \$500,000 has been raised by the two candidates so far. At this point in the last race for judge in 2008, deputy district attorneys Douglas Treisman and Jim Kelley raised one-fifth of that amount altogether for their campaigns. Kelley prevailed in that contest.

Residents should expect to be drowned in propaganda from both sides. We are confident the most persuasive message is delivered by Hill. The Bee recommends a vote for Rachel Hill for Fresno County Superior Court Judge Seat No. 15 in the Nov. 4 election.

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