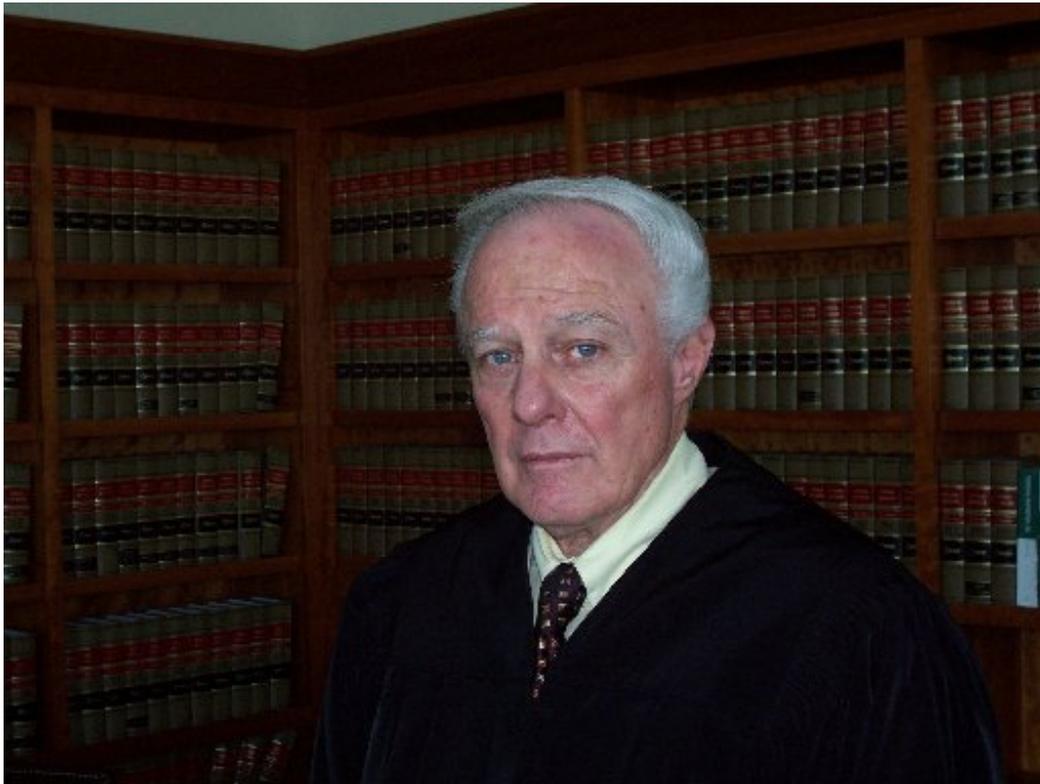


Former federal judge Wanger unhappy with attack ad that talks of water and activist judges

By John
Ellis



Oliver W. Wanger

Former U.S. District Court Judge Oliver W. Wanger is unhappy — very unhappy — about a political advertisement in Friday's Bee concerning the heated Fresno County Superior Court judge race between Lisa Gamoian and Rachel Hill.

In fact, he's downright angry.

The ad, titled "Who is the Real Rachel Hill," was run by the Gamoian campaign and attacks Hill, saying that she called Fox News "untruthful" and conservatives "ignorant," among other things. The terms are taken from two longer January 2010 posts Hill made on her Facebook account.

But that's not what has Wanger — who is now in private practice — so angry. He's mad about another part of the ad that starts by saying Hill's "writings indicate she will be a liberal activist judge who will legislate from the bench."

The next line reads: "Liberal activist judges are why we don't feel safe and why we don't have water."

Wanger says that there are only two judges who have dealt with water in Fresno — and he's one of them. The other is current U.S. District Court Judge Lawrence J. O'Neill. Both have rendered decisions on threatened delta smelt and endangered salmon species, as well as rulings that affected water allocations to the Westlands Water District and other agencies.

“It can only refer to Judge O’Neill and me and nothing can be further from the truth,” Wanger said of the water reference in the ad. “We are lifetime Republicans. We were appointed by Republican presidents. I have been excoriated by environmentalists for my decisions.”

But Tim Orman, who is Gamoian’s campaign consultant, said the line — which mentions no judge by name — was never meant as a reference to Wanger or O’Neill.

“His premise, respectfully, is completely wrong,” Orman said. “He knows that because I told him that in a phone conversation. Nowhere in that ad can you make the generalization that the reference is to him or anyone else.”

But if it does refer to anyone, Orman said, it would be Senior U.S. District Judge Lawrence K. Karlton, who is based in Sacramento and who made a series of decisions that ultimately led to an agreement resulting in the current, controversial, San Joaquin River restoration plan.

Wanger — who has endorsed Hill in the race — went on to say that because Gamoian approved the ad, it calls into question her judgment skills.

“It is disgraceful and it is total proof of a lack of judgment and complete disregard for knowing the facts because none of those statements are true,” Wanger said.

Orman says Wanger is missing the point: “Rachel Hill is a big government liberal who is pretending to be one of us.”

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