

Local leaders defend judicial candidate Rachel Hill

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Fresno County Superior Court Judge Robert Oliver joined several other judges, local leaders and business leaders today in support of judicial candidate Rachel Hill in response to recent negative campaigning in the race.

The group met for a press conference at the Greater Fresno Area Chamber of Commerce in downtown Fresno, defending Hill against a full-page ad in Friday's issue of The Fresno Bee labeling her a liberal activist that has called Fox News untruthful, conservatives ignorant and supports more government.

The ad, sponsored by the campaign of Hill's opponent, Lisa Gamoian, further states Hill will be the kind of liberal judge that are the reason why "we don't feel safe and why we don't have water."

Sitting Superior Court Judge Robert Oliver, who Hill and Gamoian seek to replace in November, denounced those assumptions as he waved a copy of the ad, comparing it to another positive ad by the Hill campaign listing her accomplishments.

Oliver, who had previously intended to remain neutral in the race, said judges should not be politically biased in their decisions, a principle that is called into question with the recent Gamoian ad.

He also called the ad misleading given that water issues are determined by federal court judges and will be outside of Hill's jurisdiction if she's elected.

"Our judicial system is not helped when there is an election such as this manner in which it frankly has deteriorated,"

Oliver said.

Gamoian fired back in a statement, saying Fresno County voters should know the true beliefs and job history of each candidate. Gamoian said she has consistently shared her "beliefs, priorities, personal history, job history and my approach to make the courts more efficient..." with voters.

"Hill and her supporters say I am running a negative campaign, but they choose to ignore what she said at her press conference when she attacks me personally saying I have a predetermined agenda and more than hinted that I will not be fair or honest. And she presents no evidence because she doesn't have any," Gamoian stated.

"That is the kind of double standard the Hill campaign hopes the media will ignore or gloss over. As Fresno's #1 Homicide Prosecutor, I am obligated to present the truth about myself and about my opponent. I have done that and will continue to do that."

Others speaking out in support of Hill were Sanger Mayor Joshua Mitchell, former Fresno Mayor Alan Autry, Fresno attorney Victoria Bernhardt and Granville Homes President Darius Assemi, all expressing their dismay at the kind of negative campaigning that turns potential voters against the electoral system.

"I understand the political consultants recommend to their candidate to go negative but this is a position for judge and we are better than this. Fresno County is better than this," Assemi said. "We deserve better and that's why I continue to support Rachel Hill for judge. She has run a clean campaign and this is the kind of person we need to see on the bench."

Al Smith, president of the Greater Fresno Area Chamber of Commerce, hailed Hill's accomplishments as a district attorney, educator and private attorney as reasons why the chamber's political action committee endorsed her in a two-thirds vote several months ago.

"They were impressed by her desire to include the entire judicial process, encouraging cooperation and conformity in all the elements of the system, whether it's the public defender's office, the D.A.'s office, etcetera, and we think her approach is smart in its balance and will assist with the revolving door in our jails," Smith said. "We do appreciate her dedication to staying positive in this campaign."

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