

Washington County PA Primary Election ~ May 16, 2017

Choosing a Judge

Choosing a Common Pleas Court Judge from among a group of attorneys with diverse backgrounds and experience sets is not an easy task. Here are universal characteristics that appear in numerous descriptions of what makes a good judge. Use this as a guide when talking with candidates or with those who know the candidates.

Intellectual capacity

A judge must have the ability to see that which may not be so obvious and to comprehend and weigh often disparate points of view.

Legal Ability

A judge must possess the intellectual capacity to interpret and apply both broad and specific principles of law, interpret a range of laws, understand and apply the Constitution in order to reach fair, impartial and well-reasoned decisions based solidly on the law.

Judicial Temperament

Showing patience, open-mindedness, courtesy, tact, firmness, understanding, civility and impartiality and effectively communicating with all those in the courtroom are fundamental characteristics.

Trial and Other Courtroom Experience

A judicial candidate must show evidence of experience in brief writing, significant active experience in the courtroom including trial work to understand courtroom procedure and dynamics. Appellate level work is a plus to fully understand how decisions and process are viewed on appeal.

Reputation for Integrity and Character

A judge must be above reproach as the integrity of the court is the integrity of the judge. This carries into a candidate's personal life and dealings in the community.

Ethics

The profession sets minimum judicial standards for maintaining independence, impartiality and the avoidance of impropriety. The expectation is that a judge's ethics are far above minimum. There should be no hint of ethical lapse.

Education

In addition to degrees from respected undergraduate and law schools, judges should demonstrate a regard for education as a continuing experience. A high performing judge is knowledgeable of changes in the law and new legal interpretations of the law.

Ability to Communicate

A solid judicial candidate should possess excellent verbal as well as written communication skills. Experience in oral argument presentation, written argument (briefs) and other formal and informal communication to all he or she serves is essential.

Administrative Ability

Judges must administer their cases therefore administrative ability to hear and decide cases in a reasonable period is an essential skill set for the judicial candidate.

Demonstrate Sound Judgement in Professional Life

A judge must possess good work habits, be able to set priorities, be respectful of the time commitments of those around him or her and earnestly strive to keep appointments and commitments

Comparison of Common Pleas Judge Candidates – 2017 Primary

The five candidates for Common Pleas Judge are compared in a number of relevant categories in the table below. The information was derived from candidate web sites and published materials and then reviewed by the candidates. If no response to our request for information was received from the candidate, that category is noted as “No response received”.

Criteria	Kristin Clingerman	Joyce Hatfield-Wise	Charles Kurowski	Phil Melograne	Brandon Neuman
Washington County Bar Association Rating (www.washcobar.org/public-education)					
1-Highly Recommended	49	10	8	50	20
2-Recommended	63	40	24	56	37
3-Not Recommended	41	97	126	48	98
Years in active practice as an attorney?	25 years	19 years	37 years	30 years	No response received
Type of activities while practicing as an attorney	Asst. District Attorney, lead prosecutor – Specialized Victims Unit, First Asst. public defender, Private Practice	Solicitor – CYS. Now sole practitioner, private cases and court appointment	Attorney at Law and Businessman	Partner – law firm. Now sole practitioner. Prosecutor. Former Judge (appointed for 1 ½ years)	No response received
Type of Practice/major areas of practice	Criminal, Family Law, estate, equine, law and personal injury	Family and children’s law, termination of parental rights, delinquency, guardianship	Civil, criminal, custody, divorce and personal injury	Criminal litigation (certified to handle death penalty cases), civil	No response received
Percent of time spent in court	90%	“Nearly daily” before multiple judges and masters	80%	70%	No response received
Cases handled	12,000 cases and 150 felony jury trials	All cases resolved/heard by court	“Thousands, both jury and non-jury trials”	“Thousands as a lawyer/prosecutor, hundreds as a judge”	No response received
Experience in appellate court	Criminal appeals, paternity fraud, equitable distribution appeals	Extensive experience before Superior Court and twice before Supreme Court	Superior Court and Supreme Court with 10 cases reversing lower court.	Statutory appeals and Superior Court	No response received
Reason seeking to become a judge	Be a judge free of political influence, extensive experience, strong courtroom background, knowledge of courtroom procedure	Uniquely qualified and desire to serve the community	Extensive legal experience, bring fairness to the court, restore confidence in the bench. Desire to save taxpayers money by reducing Masters and “fill-in” judges	Bring legal experience and previous experience as a judge to the bench.	No response received

Presented by the Washington County Republican Party (www.wcpagop.com) and not authorized by any candidate, or candidate committee. Washington County Republican Party has not officially endorsed any candidate(s) in the 2017 Primary Election.