



Scott L. Horne, Circuit Judge

CIRCUIT COURT • BRANCH 4
La Crosse County Courthouse & Law Enforcement Center
333 Vine Street • Room 3500
La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601-3296

Office: (608) 785-9851
Fax: (608) 785-5607

Michelle Stello, Court Reporter
Elaine Tetzloff, Deputy Clerk
Holly Coy, Judicial Assistant

April 1, 2024

To the voters of La Crosse County:

I have been asked about a couple of recent flyers disseminated to LaCrosse County voters in anticipation of next week's judicial election for LaCrosse Circuit Court, Branch 3. I do not see anything in the mailers that would allow for any official action as chief judge or as a sitting circuit judge. I do have the following concerns about mailings of this sort in local judicial races.

Judge Mark Huesmann was appointed by Governor Tony Evers in accordance with law to fill the seat of Judge Todd Bjerke who retired last summer. Judge Huesmann was appointed to serve until an election could be held this April 2 to select a judge for a full six year term beginning August 1.

Judge Huesmann is opposed by Candice Tlustosch, an attorney with an office in LaCrosse. Previously, Governor Walker used this same constitutional appointment process to appoint her to fill the seat of retired Judge Dale Pasell until an election could be held.

The flyers were paid for by an organization identified as "Fair Courts America." This organization labels itself a national organization, "tracking the woke mob's activity." It then criticizes Judge Huesmann for being supported by "radical politicians," presumably including Governor Evers who appointed Judge Huesmann. The office of Circuit Court Judge is non-partisan and to my knowledge Judge Huesmann has honored this principle—having been a colleague for 8 months, I have no idea of his political leanings.

Like many such organizations and publications, on both ends of the political spectrum, these mailers exhibit little awareness or understanding of local issues and candidates in favor of generic, dramatic and largely untrue attacks. I would be surprised if the authors had ever stepped foot in a LaCrosse County courtroom. We have been accustomed to such mailers being employed in national and state races on both sides of the political spectrum with the effect that the level of debate is reduced and offices themselves are demeaned.

We now see national entities using these same techniques to impact local judicial races and in the process distort the nonpartisan role of judges and mislead the public. These offices are nonpartisan for good reason—every citizen is entitled to walk into a courtroom and know their judge is not biased against him or her by virtue of partisan political allegiance. Frequently, candidates have been associated with political parties before taking office however it is important that candidates set aside partisanship upon taking office and that the parties and their members respect this need for independence among the judiciary.

While I have not endorsed either candidate, the reality is that Judge Huesmann has proven himself to be a hard-working, impartial and conscientious judge who treats members of the public, litigants and attorneys with respect. Similarly, Ms. Tlustosch proved herself to be a competent and able judge during her time on the bench following Judge Pasell's retirement.

The office of Circuit Court Judge is an important one. The Circuit Court is a place where citizens go to resolve disputes fairly and impartially. Citizens may enter a courtroom for many reasons—they may be involved in a criminal case as the person accused, as a victim or family member of a person affected; they may have a family matter or small claims or civil dispute. In every case, the judge matters—qualities of character, judgment and temperament, impartiality, legal knowledge and work ethic are important in a judge.

I urge voters to reject advertisements from special interest groups with little knowledge or concern of local issues or candidates. If you have had a case in front of one of the candidates or know them and their qualifications, rely upon your impression. If you have not, seek out the opinions and insights of those who are familiar with the candidates and weigh those opinions and the reasons for them. The judges of the judicial candidates are fellow citizens who live in the community and are affected by their judgments.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott L. Horne', written in a cursive style.

Scott L. Horne
Chief Judge, 7th Judicial District
Circuit Court, Branch 4
333 Vine Street
La Crosse, WI 54650

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