



Abe Jones, a former superior court judge, talks about why he should be on the appeals court last week at Forsyth County Democratic Headquarters.



Greg Stelzer chats with Carrie Vickery, a District Court judicial candidate, last week at Forsyth County Democratic Headquarters.

Democratic judicial candidates tout experience, fairness

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

Democrats running for judicial office presented their qualifications to voters at Forsyth County Democratic Headquarters on Thursday, Aug. 25.

Candidates running for District Court, Court of Appeals and the N.C. Supreme Court all spoke to attendees. Judicial candidates tend to avoid taking partisan stances, since they need to be objective on the issues that come before them. Instead they often focus on their experience to differentiate themselves from their opponents and that's exactly what five candidates did during last week's campaign event.

Carrie Vickery, who is running in Forsyth County for District Court judge, said it's not just the quantity of her experience, but the diverse quality of it that makes her the best choice for voters.

"I am the only candidate in this race that has practiced and continues to practice in every single courtroom that comes before the district court," said Vickery.

Vickery has been an attorney with the Holton Law Firm since 2009. She's practiced criminal and civil law and is a board

certified family law specialist. Her opponent, Aaron Berlin, has been a Forsyth County assistant district attorney since 2011. They're both running for the 21st Judicial District seat currently held by Judge William Graham, who is retiring.

Superior Court Judge Mike Morgan made similar arguments as to why more than 26 years as a superior, administrative and district court judge made him more qualified to be a N.C. Supreme Court judge, than incumbent Justice Robert Edmunds. He said presiding over diverse types of cases that may be appealed to the high court makes him better suited to review those cases as a justice.

"My opponent doesn't know what he doesn't know," said Morgan.

Edmunds, who served on the N.C. Supreme Court since 2001, has been a lawyer, district attorney and served two years on the appeals court before being elected to his current position.

Originally, the General Assembly changed N.C. Supreme Court re-elections so that incumbents wouldn't face challengers and the only vote would be on if they should keep the seat or not. If a justice was voted out, the governor would've appointed a replacement. The retention

elections were declared unconstitutional in the courts, causing the seat to be on the June 7 primary. Morgan came in second behind Edmunds in that primary. He said he thought the retention election was a "reward" to Edmunds by Republican lawmakers for upholding redistricting legislation.

Morgan said that his election would give Democrats a majority on the court, but instead of partisanship, he promised to be fair and impartial. He said judges should not have political predispositions.

Candidates for the N.C. Court of Appeals made similar arguments. The appeals court is comprised of 15 members who sit in rotating panels of three and serve eight-year terms. Wake County District Court Judge Vince Rozier felt lower court judicial experience is vital to the appeals court. However, only three out of the current 15 appeals judges had that type of experience before joining the court.

"It's like there are 12 principals who've never been teachers in the classroom and they're telling teachers what should happen," Rozier said.

His opponent, incumbent Richard Dietz of Winston-Salem, was an attorney

before being appointed to the court by Gov. Pat McCrory in 2014.

Candidate Abe Jones also has many years of experience he wants to bring to the appeals court. He served from 1995-2012 as a superior court judge in Wake County. He is currently engaged in private practice and as an adjunct professor at UNC Law School.

"You have to bring something with you to the bench," said Jones.

He's running against incumbent Bob Hunter of Raleigh who was a N.C. deputy attorney general before being elected to the appeals court in 2008.

District Court Judge Rickye McKoy-Mitchell also has a lot of experience, having held her position since 1998. She is the longest serving district court judge in Mecklenburg County's 26th Judicial District. Her opponent, incumbent Justice Valerie Zachary of Yadkinville, was an attorney before being appointed to the court by McCrory in July 2015.

"We will be bringing to you experience, fairness, commitment on the bench and in the community, and being respected about what we do because we respect those that come before us," said McKoy-Mitchell.

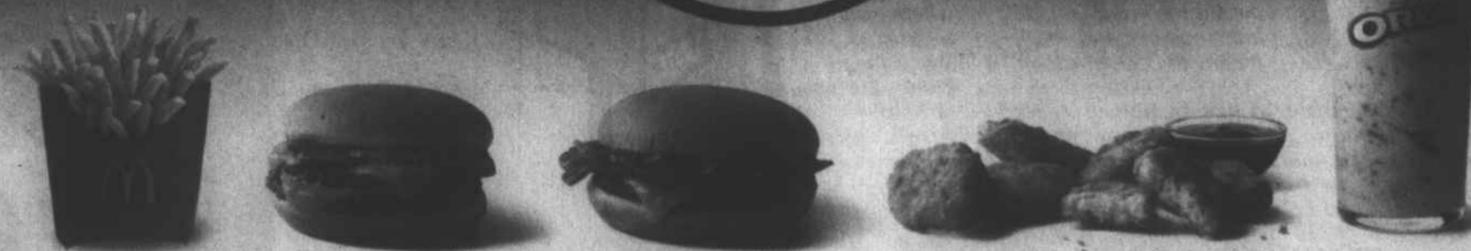


Photos By Todd Luck
Judge Rickye McKoy-Mitchell speaks to voters on her candidacy for appeals court judge at the Forsyth County Democratic Headquarters on Thursday, Aug. 25.

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