

Judge Morgan vies for high court seat in November



Morgan

BY CASH MICHAELS
FOR THE CHRONICLE

After over 26 years on the North Carolina bench, Wake Superior Court Judge Michael Morgan believes he now has the length and

CAMPAIGN



breath of experience to serve on the state Supreme Court.

"Certainly I'm better qualified than the incumbent who currently holds the seat," Morgan said during a recent phone interview.

Apparently a lot of North Carolina voters agree with Judge Morgan. He was the second most popular vote-getter out of four during the June 7 special primary behind incumbent N.C. Senior Associate Justice Robert H. Edmunds Jr., thus securing a November battle.

But unseating Justice Edmunds this fall will be a

tall order, especially given that the veteran jurist has the endorsement of several former Supreme Court justices, just about every sheriff in the state, Gov. Pat McCrory, and the N.C. Republican Party. In addition, the Republican-led N.C. General Assembly passed a retention law last year so that Edmunds wouldn't originally have to face re-election. A subsequent Wake Superior Court panel ruled the retention law unconstitutional; however, the state Supreme Court (minus Edmunds) heard arguments in April for a final decision.

Until they rule, Edmunds must run. If the justices split evenly, then the Wake judicial panel's ruling stands, and the retention law fails.

So Morgan and Edmunds will now face off for Edmunds' seat during the Nov. 8 general election. Turnout will most likely not be an issue since there is also a divisive presidential election on the ballot, as well as races for North Carolina governor and the U.S. Senate, congressional

and legislative races.

Nov. 8 promises to deliver plenty of voters to the polls. The problem could be that by the time voters go through all of the candidates in the high profile contests, they may not turn over their ballots to see the important High Court race on the other side.

That means Judge Morgan, a registered Democrat, has a lot of work to do across the state to get his name, face and history in front of voters. Judicial candidates aren't afforded the luxuries of partisan politicians for elective office. Their allegiance is supposed to be to upholding the law, not to a party or special money interest.

Additionally, it is difficult for African-American candidates for statewide office like Morgan to win in North Carolina. N.C. Associate Justice Cheri Beasley barely won her seat in 2014, and Linda Coleman lost by a whisker when she first ran for Lieutenant Governor in 2012.

That's why Judge

Morgan is hopeful that his almost three decades on the bench at various levels of state jurisprudence - longer than Justice Edmunds - will prove to the voters in November that he is worthy of their consideration. State administrative law judge for five years; district court judge for ten years; and his current position of superior court judge for eleven years.

"Add to that that my opponent, while he has been a Supreme Court justice, and is currently in that seat, has never been a trial judge," says Judge Morgan. "Supreme Court justices review the courts' records that are generated in the lower courts. They are a reviewing court to see what errors have been committed potentially in the courts below."

A review of Justice Edmunds' record confirms that while he has been a state and federal litigator, in addition to serving on the state Court of Appeals and Supreme Court for sixteen years, he has never been a trial judge.

If Morgan wins in

November, he will be one of two African-Americans serving on the seven-member N.C. Supreme Court, but the only black male. And while Morgan is sensitive to the importance and appearance of an African-American male serving on the state's highest court, he says it's even more important that people look past his color and see a better qualified, fair candidate.

The stakes are high in the Morgan - Edmunds race, because the winner decides the ideological balance of power on the 4-3 conservative state High Court.

A native of Cherry Point, Mike Morgan is the oldest of five children. He graduated from New Bern public schools. Morgan received his B.A. in both

history and sociology from Duke University in 1976. He earned his Juris Doctor degree with honors from North Carolina Central University in 1979. From 1983 to 1989, Morgan was an assistant state Attorney General in the N.C. Department of Justice. From 1989 to 1994, he served as a N.C. administrative law judge; from 1994 to 2004 a district court judge; and from 2005 to the present a Wake County superior court judge.

"I love what I do," Judge Morgan says. "I feel that after this length of service, I'm due for a promotion and ready for greater service. I hope that the people of North Carolina agree that I am ready."

Hillary Clinton: Up Close

Editor's note: Democratic Presidential Candidate Hillary Clinton visited Charlotte with President Obama on Tuesday. The Chronicle gives a glimpse of the candidate via The Chicago Defender. She sat with The Chicago Defender, a member of the National Newspapers Publishers' Association, to discuss her vision for a better America. The full story can be found at <http://chicagodefender.com/2016/06/30/hillary-up-close/>.

BY KAI EL ZABAR, NNPA/
THE CHICAGO DEFENDER

Hillary Clinton came to Chicago on her Midwest campaign jaunt to address the Women's International Luncheon at the Rainbow PUSH Coalition's 45th annual convention.

Afterward, The Chicago Defender got up close and personal with the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee to get greater insight into her vision for a better America.

"I have an old-fashioned belief that if you run for president, you should tell people what you're going to do," Clinton said as she revved up. "Listen, the next president of the United States can have the opportunity to select one, two, three Supreme Court justices ... and we don't want that president to be Donald Trump."

Backstage at the luncheon, Clinton said that she has a personal commitment to working with The Black Press and all local press; however, she has noticed in particular the assumption of some in various parts of the country where she has traveled that it is assumed that The Black Press will show up.

"And that's not always the case, so we want to make sure that we make the effort to reach out, and not only during the campaign, but even in the White House," Clinton said. "I see The Black Press playing an active role in getting our message out directly to its readers, participating in the various activities such as today's luncheon, and making sure that it has access as well as being included in the advertising buy."

Clinton has made it clear that she will continue the initiatives that President Barack Obama implemented and work to enhance affordable health care. She credits the president with saving America

from another depression, having inherited the worst financial crisis in American history since the Great Depression. And he's done so much more that he is not given credit for, she said, and she plans to continue support of those efforts of great concern.

When asked about the underserved communities (black, brown, LGBT, etc.), Clinton said she has plans to address the issues that pertain to each, and one can actually go to her website and read exactly what her vision is. However, she provided insight and began, "First of all, we need more good jobs with rising incomes, because we're just not seeing enough of them. There aren't enough employment opportunities in Chicago's underserved communities."

It's clear that Clinton recognizes the disparities that plague the marginalized.

"We need to make sure that there are some big, bold programs like infrastructure, like clean renewable energy, like advanced manufacturing, that are within the reach of those people who need those jobs and have to be given the chance to compete for them," she said, noting in the past 10 to 15 years, a lot of the jobs in the country are not within reach of those who live in the most distressed urban or rural areas.

So Hillary Clinton says she wants to make jobs available first. Second, education. She is adamant that young children be better prepared to go to school and supported throughout so they will be successful.

"There are a lot of ways we can do that. I am committed to working with communities, churches and educational systems to try to figure out how." But it's clear that she gets the comprehension thread that makes it all work.

"But parents and grandparents have to be supported in doing the most important job of raising the next generation of children, and we need to do all that we can to see to it that we do that," she said.

Clinton spoke to her vision to re-create "schools that people believe in, that they are passionate about, and we have that in a lot of places and I know that you don't have that in Chicago."

"We need diversionary programs so that we're not suspending and expelling 5-, 6-, 7- and 8-year-old kids who are acting out,"

she said. "We have a terrible disciplinary divide where kids who are either having problems or are just acting like normal kids being suspended if they're African-American or Latino and white kids doing the same thing aren't."

She paused and continued, "That starts the whole cradle-to-prison pipeline."

In her effort to end the cradle-to-prison pipeline, Clinton envisions doing more to intervene in helping the little kids be successful, which would include after school support intervention programs.

For the older youth, she recognizes that there is no place for teenagers to direct their energies and how easy it is for them to be misdirected, often leading to gang affiliation or some other form of violence of destructive behavior.

"There are no organized activities," Clinton said. "There's nothing that breaks the attraction of a gang, where their thinking is 'at least I'm on a team' if they're in a gang, as opposed to having options to choose from like being on a team (sports, academics, etc.) that may advance their life rather than end their life."

She then segued to comment on Chicago: "I am really confused as to why Chicago has so much more violence year after year. And we have to factor that into federal programs. Congressman Jim Clyburn of South Carolina has an excellent program that he calls 10, 20, 30, where 10 percent of federal money would go to 20 percent of the communities that have had 30 years of poverty. We have to focus on these places and it can't be one size fits all. What may work in Chicago may not necessarily work in Miami or New Orleans."

Regarding the gun-control issue and the associated violence, Clinton speaks passionately: "It's a civil rights issue and I will do everything I can: legislation, regulation, litigation because I think we have veered off the track. We are intimidated by, controlled by and directed by the gun lobby in Washington. Members of Congress are scared to death, governors and state legislatures are scared to death, and why? Because the gun lobby represents a dedicated focused group of voters. And they will make anybody who doesn't vote with them pay the price."

However, she noted that yet the vast majority of people want these changes, so we've got to start acting like they are a voting issue to us.

She also pointed out that she promised the parents who have lost children to gun violence that, "I will do everything I can to change the gun laws. I will work continuously to do so."

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