



[Comments](#) 1 | [Recommend](#) 0

Editorial: We recommend Murphy, Bridges and Fitzgerald for 5th appeals court

07:38 AM CDT on Thursday, September 11, 2008

Three judgeships are up for election on the 13-member Court of Appeals for the Fifth District of Texas. The Dallas-based court handles civil and criminal appeals from district and county courts in the following counties: Dallas, Collin, Grayson, Hunt, Rockwall and Kaufman. The judges serve six-year terms.

Murphy for Fifth District Court of Appeals, Place 3

About 35 years ago, Mary Murphy was a word processor at a law firm, watching the swirl of legal activity, when she decided that she could play on this field.

She was right. From legal secretary to paralegal to associate attorney to partner to court master to state district judge, she proved it. Along the way, the Republican became one of Dallas' top legal minds and ultimately one of its most respected judges.

At 55, she says she's ready to step up and fill a vacancy on the Fifth District Court of Appeals, which handles cases from six counties, including Dallas. She's right about that, too.

Her 14th Civil District Court ranks among the most efficient in Dallas County in cases handled and cost per disposition. Lawyers who work in front of her praise her for fair, respectful treatment and judicial restraint.

A frequent legal speaker and panelist, she also received the 2007 Presidential Commendation for Individual Leadership in Improving Justice from the State Bar of Texas.

Her Democratic opponent, Don B. Chae, served for 12 years as a municipal judge in Dallas. He styles himself "a people's judge" or "the smiling judge" but declined to complete our online questionnaire or meet with us. He also would not give his age, although public records show he's 74. Dr. Chae cites "sufficient experience" and a deep understanding of human nature, history and philosophy.

Judge Murphy has the stronger argument.

Bridges for Fifth District Court of Appeals, Place 6

Justice David L. Bridges, a Republican from Fate, has written more than 1,200 opinions in 12 years on the appeals court. His Democratic opponent, first-term state District Judge David Hanschen of Dallas, finds fault with none of them.

Experience shows, and for that reason Justice Bridges, 53, is the superior choice in this contest.

The incumbent has a broader background, from 25 years in the legal field, including work as a legal-aid lawyer in the Panhandle, counsel for the State Bar of Texas and an assistant district attorney handling felonies and appeals.

This is the third political race in six years for Judge Hanschen, 58. He lost a bid for a state district judgeship in 2002 and won a second try in 2006.

Judge Hanschen has done criminal defense work, including two felony cases, and says his background as an entrepreneur would benefit the court's consideration of business matters. We respect his thinking, but in this case his qualifications fall short of his opponent's.

Fitzgerald for Fifth District Court of Appeals, Place 8

Justice Kerry Fitzgerald has held Place 8 on the Fifth District Court of Appeals for almost nine years. His Democratic opponent failed to make a compelling case for why voters should trade him out for her.

Judge Fitzgerald comes across as temperamentally sound and profoundly serious about the law. Moreover, the 66-year-old Dallas Republican has a depth and breadth of bench experience that challenger Tina Yoo simply can't match.

Ms. Yoo, 38, a Dallas lawyer who works as a judge for the city of Hutchins, doesn't challenge Justice Fitzgerald on his legal philosophy or record. Rather, the Democrat's chief argument is that she'd be better for the job because she understands computers better than the incumbent.

We agree that getting this court into the 21st century technologically is important. But there's no indication that Justice Fitzgerald is doing anything to slow that process or that Ms. Yoo, if elected, could somehow speed it up.

Voters would do well to send Justice Fitzgerald back for another term on the appeals court.