

Williams, Stephens and Johnson for court positions

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The power of incumbency to stave off competition is nowhere as evident as it is in this year's judicial races.

Fifteen court incumbents have races on Pierce County voters' ballots, but only two drew any opposition: Washington Supreme Court justices Charles W. Johnson and Debra L. Stephens.

Neither opponent poses much of a threat. One isn't actively campaigning because he's teaching at a women's law school in Korea. The other is a disbarred attorney who might not be eligible to serve even in the unlikely event he's elected.

Only one of the eight Pierce County District Court seats up for election this year is being contested – and it's the only open position. Incumbents are running unopposed in the seven other seats.

In the one District Court contest, attorneys Jeanette Lineberry of Gig Harbor and **Karl Williams** of University Place are running to replace retiring Judge Patrick O'Malley. Lineberry was the top vote-getter in the three-way August primary, and she would make a terrific judge.

However, we think Williams is the superior choice. He would bring more experience to the bench, including extensive work as a pro-tem judge on the District Court and city courts. An African American, he also would add much-needed diversity to the court, which currently is all white. He received our endorsement in the primary – and he gets it again in the general election.

Whatever voters decide, they can't go wrong with either of these fine candidates – and that hasn't always been the case in Pierce County judicial races.

In the Supreme Court races, voters are well-advised to return the two solid incumbents to the bench.

Charles W. Johnson is being challenged by Eddie Yoon of University Place, who says he was the first Korean attorney in the Pacific Northwest. His News Tribune voter's guide statement reveals no civic involvement or evidence that he is actively campaigning for the job.

Johnson, a Gig Harbor resident, is the longest-serving justice on the court (since 1991) and has a formidable record of service in civic and legal affairs. He deserves a fifth term.

In the other contested Supreme Court race, incumbent **Debra L. Stephens** is challenged by John "Zamboni" Scannell, whose nickname refers to his history driving a Zamboni machine at Seattle

hockey games. He is a disbarred lawyer, so it's unclear whether he would be able to serve if elected. He says he's running to bring attention to what he says is his invalid disbarment.

That may be reason enough to run, but it's hardly enough reason to vote for him. The News Tribune editorial board endorses Stephens, a Spokane native who has served on the high court since 2007. She brings valuable east-of-the-mountains perspective to a bench otherwise dominated by Western Washingtonians.

To read more election endorsement editorials, go to thenewstribune.com/endorsements.

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