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Four State Supreme Court justices face little competition in races

The nonpartisan court races are mostly noteworthy because they have not generated the spirited campaigns seen over the past several years.

By Steve Miletich

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Four state Supreme Court justices are asking voters to return them to the bench on the November ballot, but two have no opponents and the other two face nominal opposition.

In the two contested races, weak candidates are seeking to unseat Justices Debra Stephens and Charles Johnson.

The nonpartisan court races are mostly noteworthy because they have not generated the spirited campaigns and fundraising seen over the past several years — particularly at a time when the court has been under a spotlight over its efforts to force the state Legislature to adequately fund public schools.

Justices Mary Yu, a former King County Superior Court judge appointed by Gov. Jay Inslee in May to a vacant seat, is running unopposed on the Nov. 4 ballot to fill out the two years remaining in the term of Justice James Johnson, who retired. Her appointment made her the first openly gay justice, as well as the first Asian American, to serve on the state's high court.

Justice Mary Fairhurst, who has served on the court since 2003, also faces no opposition in her bid for a third six-year term.

Johnson, the associate chief justice who is seeking a fifth six-year term, lists top bar ratings and a long tally of endorsements on his campaign website. On his judicial philosophy, he cites a commitment to individual privacy and holding government accountable.

Johnson is opposed by Pierce County attorney Eddie Yoon, who does not have a campaign website or a list of endorsements.

Yoon also has raised no money, according to state records, although he has paid for newspaper advertising.

Yoon is an adjunct professor at a prestigious law school in South Korea who says he served as an assistant prosecutor in Tacoma in the late 1970s. He offers that he would bring real-life experience to the bench and a "lot more personality" to the court, while he acknowledges he has little chance of winning.

Stephens, who joined the high court in 2008, is seeking a second six-year term. A Spokane native, she emphasizes her dedication to upholding the rule of law and being the only current justice from Eastern Washington.

Stephens wrote the majority opinion in the court's 2012 school-funding decision known as the

McCleary case. Her campaign website lists top bar ratings and many endorsements.

She is being challenged by John (Zamboni) Scannell, a disbarred attorney whose nickname derives from a previous job driving the Zamboni ice-resurfacing machine at Seattle Center.

If elected, Scannell likely would face a challenge to his seating because of his disbarment.

Under the state constitution, one section reads, "No person shall be eligible to the office of judge of the supreme court, or judge of a superior court, unless he shall have been admitted to practice in the courts of record of this state, or of the Territory of Washington."

In addition, state qualification standards require judges to be in good standing to practice law in Washington.

Stephens wrote the 2010 opinion disbaring Scannell for obstructing a Washington State Bar Association investigation, including an allegation that he did not adequately inform clients of a potential conflict of interest.

Stephens was given the option of challenging Scannell's position on the ballot but she opted not to pursue the issue, according to the Secretary of State's Office, which does not independently determine candidate qualifications.

Scannell, whose odds of winning appear slim, has raised no money in the race, state records show.

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