

Elect Stephens, Johnson for Supreme Court

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Position 4 incumbent Charles W. Johnson, and Debra L. Stephens. The Olympian endorsements for Washington Supreme Court. COURTESY PHOTOS

Only two of the four Supreme Court of Washington justices seeking re-election this year have drawn opponents. But to call their challengers “opponents” is to overstate their qualifications for the job.

Position 4 incumbent Charles W. Johnson is running against a candidate who is neither campaigning nor, when we last checked, in the United States. Position 7 incumbent Debra L. Stephens is running against a disbarred lawyer who could not serve if elected.

Voters should unquestionably return Stephens and Johnson to the bench.

Justices Mary Fairhurst (Position 3) and Mary Yu (position 1) are unopposed.

Charles W. Johnson versus Eddie Yoon

Johnson is the most senior member of the court. Johnson first won election in the 1990 campaign in which he defeated a sitting chief justice, Keith Callow, a rare occurrence in Washington state politics.

During his 24 years, Johnson has championed individual rights, especially the right to privacy. And he has worked hard to improve court efficiency and transparency. He strongly supported the effort to make gavel-to-gavel court deliberations open to public viewing via TVW, Washington's public affairs television network.

He has fought for those less privileged, earning him recognition from the American Bar Association Council on Racial and Ethnic Fairness. He points to programs that have trained and licensed court interpreters, speaking about 100 different languages, and programs to make courts more accessible to low-income people.

In another term, Johnson hopes to do more to increase everyone's access to a fair and impartial justice system. And he has an excellent record of community service.

Johnson's opponent is Eddie Yoon, who claims to be the first attorney of Korean descent to practice in the Pacific Northwest. He doesn't appear to be campaigning for the position and at last report was residing in Korea.

Debra L. Stephens versus John Scannell

Stephens was appointed to the court in 2007 by then Gov. Christine Gregoire and ran unopposed in 2008. She is seeking her second full term.

Stephens grew up in Spokane and earned undergraduate and law degrees from Gonzaga University. She also practiced law there, mostly in civil litigation and appellate matters. Stephens adds the lone Eastern Washington perspective to the court.

Stephens is a bright, serious and articulate Justice, who believes the law should make sense to people in their daily lives. She sees one of the court's roles as convening important conversations to create awareness and find solutions to problems -- for example, how LGBT and racial minorities are disproportionately targeted by law enforcement.

Deciding cases is just one part of the court's job, and Stephens is actively engaged in the court's other role of running the state's judicial system. She's concerned about the lack of court funding and how that has pushed the cost of litigation beyond the reach of most people.

In a second term, she would promote initiatives to increase access, provide more training, and take better care of lower court judges and court staff. She is focused on using new technology to make the courts more efficient.

Her opponent, John Scannell, is running to protest his disbarment by the Washington State Bar Association. It's a futile public relations campaign, and no reason to vote for him.

Read more here: <http://www.theolympian.com/2014/10/02/3346044/elect-stephens-johnson-for-supreme.html?sp=/99/109/#storylink=cpy>