

The Sun

Letters  
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Hill Staton did not lose because of her race

Your analysis of the reasons for the rejection of Judge Donna Hill Staton by the voters of Howard County was a gross distortion of the truth. Ms. Hill Staton did not lose the election because of her race. Indeed, more Howard County voters likely voted for her because of her race than against her for that reason.

Her appointment and that of Judge Diane O. Leasure were controversial from the outset. The governor arrogantly disregarded the wishes of the Howard County legal and political communities and appointed two lawyers who were well-connected to his administration but whose involvement in the county was limited to little more than their residency.

While Judge Leasure quickly demonstrated that she was conscientious and diligent in discharging her judicial responsibilities, Judge Hill Staton soon accumulated an unacceptably large backlog of heard but undecided matters.

My client, an African-American, by the way, was egregiously victimized by Judge Hill Staton's nonfeasance. After waiting 20 months and enduring three postponements by her, he finally was granted a hearing before the judge on July 2, 1996, on an appeal from an administrative agency to determine whether he would be reinstated to his state employment that had been terminated in 1991. At the conclusion of the hearing, she announced that a decision would be rendered in the near future.

It is now the relatively distant future, Judge Hill Staton has left the bench and my client's case remains undecided. Because they were greatly disappointed by her performance, a number of Howard County lawyers and their clients who had initially supported Judge Hill Staton had withdrawn that support by Election Day, thus ensuring her defeat.

The system worked well in the judicial election last year in Howard County. A judge who was not doing her job was displaced on the Circuit Court by District Court Judge Lenore R. Gelfman, a highly respected, hard-working, experienced jurist.

What possibly could be wrong with that?

Barry C. Steel

Towson

In his Jan. 12 column on judgeships, Norris West is in quite a rush to get the word out that an African-American should be brought on board as the last District judge.

He does not seem concerned that any other qualified minorities might be waiting in the wings. He does not even question the naming of a white male to the District bench. I don't understand this lack of concern that a white male was selected, especially after he cites the long history of this group's domination over the Howard County judiciary.

He also complains that the county is in dire need of another judge, besides the recently appointed Neil Axel, because of the workload. When was the first time that the governor could have filled these positions? There was a suggestion that the governor should hold off until after the election in order to appoint an African-American judge to fill a district slot if Donna Hill Staton happened to lose her position on the Circuit Court.

Mr. West now seems confident that the governor will come through and appoint a minority judge (in this case, African-American) to the District Court, citing that the governor "has demonstrated his commitment to diversity."

Does he follow The Sun's thinking contained in a June 1992 editorial concerning Thurgood Marshall's replacement on the Supreme Court?

It strongly proposed that the person should unquestionably be an African-American. Based on his feelings that diversity is most important, I would expect that he supported the appointment of Clarence Thomas, or do candidates for these types of positions also have to possess certain other "qualifications"?

In my 25-odd years of living in Columbia, I have lived next door to African-Americans, Asians, Jews and others. I have been impressed by the many similarities in our philosophies despite the diverse backgrounds and interests. I believe we share more views than differ.

Unfortunately, we still have many citizens who push their limited agendas whenever they get the chance, bringing race into every issue.

R. D. Bush

Columbia

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