

The Sun

**Judges' campaigns plan last-minute blitz  
Both sides will mail, hand out much literature  
CAMPAIGN 1996**

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As Election Day nears, the heated race for Howard County's Circuit Court bench is drawing to a close with voters being inundated by a flood of campaign literature.

This week, tens of thousands of pieces of campaign literature are being mailed by both sides -- and more will be handed out this weekend -- in the last-minute rush to reach voters.

As has been the case throughout the bitter race, this week's campaign literature is replete with half-truths, mudslinging and passionate appeals.

The literature is aimed at swaying the many county voters who -- according to a round of Sun interviews two weeks ago -- remain undecided among the four candidates for the two judicial seats.

"This is, I bet, when more than 50 percent of the people make up their minds about what they are going to do," said Lin Eagan, campaign chairwoman for sitting Circuit Judges Diane O. Leasure and Donna Hill Staton.

The sitting judges' campaign has sent out a combined total of about 85,000 copies of two pieces of literature to targeted precincts in the county this week.

District Judge Lenore R. Gelfman and local attorney Jonathan Scott Smith also plan to blanket the county with literature this week.

"It's kind of like the fireworks all going off at the end," Smith said. "Our goal is by Sunday evening we will not have one piece of literature left in our headquarters."

Smith would not detail exactly how many pieces of campaign literature his campaign will mail or hand out, only saying: "It will be massive."

At the behest of both campaigns, attorneys and citizens also are sending letters to clients and friends urging them to vote for their preferred ticket.

The new literature from both sides reiterates their central messages but with sharper tacks.

In line with their tough-on-crime stance, the cover of a new Gelfman-Smith flier features the silhouette of a man holding a gun looking inside a house with a banner underneath that reads "Your Vote in the Circuit Court Judge Election Will Affect The Future of Our Neighborhoods for the next 15 years."

The flier cites three cases as evidence that Hill Staton and Leasure are allegedly soft on criminals, adding a new case to ones that have been raised before by the challengers' supporters.

It criticizes Leasure for lowering the 8-year sentence of a man who, as a teen-ager, ran a car-theft and joy-riding ring. He pleaded guilty to 12 counts of theft in 1995 before another judge.

Later, Leasure reduced his sentence to five years so, she says, he could qualify for a scholarship to attend college offered to those who complete a rigorous boot camp program. The program is available only for those with sentences of less than five years,

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Leasure said.

The man got into the program, she says, thereby extending his parole eligibility for a year to participate. "He really pulled his life together," Leasure said.

The sentence fell within state guidelines, she said. The sentences in the other two cases, which have been debated before by the competing campaigns, also fall within state guidelines.

The crime issue has been pervasive in this campaign with Smith -- the only candidate not restrained by judicial ethics -- leading the charge.

In one of the sitting judges' new mailings, they address the issue in an "open letter" to residents.

"Our reticence on the crime issue certainly does not result from detachment or aloofness or a lack of compassion," reads the letter signed by the two judges. "Quite the contrary we see it in our courtrooms and, like you, we worry for our children."

"We won't kid you -- maintaining this legally imposed silence has been incredibly frustrating over the last several months of this campaign," the letter says.

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