

The Sun

**Campaigns target front-runners  
Judges' race enters last week before election  
CAMPAIGN 1996**

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With less than a week to go before the general election, each side in the Howard County judicial race yesterday targeted the likely front-runner on the other's ticket -- sitting Circuit Judge Diane O. Leasure and challenger District Judge Lenore R. Gelfman.

A new group called Republicans to Retain the Sitting Circuit Court Judges yesterday attacked Gelfman, a registered Democrat, for trying to appeal to the county's GOP voters.

Meanwhile, the challengers' campaign began a new mailing yesterday depicting Leasure as a lenient judge.

Both tickets described their opponents' efforts as misleading and vicious.

The new campaign committee, which claims almost three dozen members, will try to generate Republican support for sitting Judges Leasure and Donna Hill Staton, said an organizer of the group, County Councilman Dennis R. Schrader.

The sitting judges won the Democratic side of the spring primary, while challengers Gelfman and attorney Jonathan Scott Smith won the Republican side. Gelfman was the combined top vote-getter, followed by Leasure.

At the Republican group's news conference, Schrader tried to undercut Gelfman's success with the GOP in the nominally nonpartisan race.

"Gelfman has misled Republicans into believing she is a Republican," he said. "This is her strategy to draw Republicans in and advance her own political agenda. It is shortsighted of our party to be fooled by this ploy."

Schrader referred to one version of a recent mailing from the challengers that states "Gelfman and Smith are the only team for Howard County Republicans" and that bears photos and the endorsements of gubernatorial candidate Ellen R. Sauerbrey, County Councilman Darrel E. Drown and other Republicans.

He also criticized the Gelfman-Smith campaign for allegedly introducing racism and sexism in the judicial race.

"Opposing the first two women appointed to the Circuit Court in 150 years only serves to reinforce an old stereotype about Republicans," Schrader said. Hill Staton also is the first African-American to serve on the Howard bench.

Later, Smith called the Republican news conference a "publicity gimmick" by the sitting judges' supporters. He said that it is inappropriate for Gelfman -- who did not return repeated phone calls yesterday -- "to respond to personal attacks."

"It's an effort to distract from the issues in the campaign -- crime and the politicization of the judicial selection process," he said. "They clearly perceive Gelfman as a threat. They're lacking a positive message of their own and they've resorted to nothing but attacks in the final days of the campaign."

In the meantime, the challengers' campaign began mailing literature that reinforces their tough-on-crime theme while sharply criticizing Leasure for a sentence she handed down in a battery case.

But Leasure said the mailing contained inaccuracies, including giving the false impression that photos of a beating victim in hospital bed represented the victim in the case over which she presided.

"It's another effort on {the challengers}' part to try to deceive the public," she said. "It's intentionally misleading but very characteristic of their campaign."

In July, Leasure sentenced Bradley Matulevich of Columbia to 18 months in jail after he was convicted of battering a teen-ager in an Ellicott City park. She also allowed him to leave jail to attend classes at Bowie State University.

Before Matulevich went before Leasure, he had been convicted of assault with the intent to maim and had served 12 months in jail for his role in the beating of another man, Shawn Sherman, who is the man pictured in the hospital bed in the challengers' mailing.

Circuit Judge Dennis M. Sweeney -- not Leasure -- presided over that case and allowed the defendant both school and work release during his jail term.

In the mailing, Smith states, "I believe that the real crime is that these types of lenient sentences send the wrong message."

Fred Silverstein, Matulevich's attorney in the first incident and former president of the county's bar group, said Leasure's sentence was strict.

Matulevich was charged in the two separate cases before he was tried in either.

In the first case, while Matulevich was serving jail time, Sweeney reduced his sentence from 18 months to 12 months because the judge "was so taken by how well {Matulevich} had done," Silverstein said.

Matulevich completed his 12-month sentence in the first case before the second case was tried by Leasure, who then gave him 18 months in that case.

"He had gone to jail and was totally rehabilitated before Leasure even saw him," Silverstein said. "She sentenced him quite heavily, and she's being chastised for being soft on crime."

The mailing also alleges that Matulevich violated work-release rules in the first case. But according to Leasure and detention center officials, there was never any formal charge.

The challengers' new mailing also is drawing fire for allegedly overstating the crime problem.

Using police crime data from the first three months of this year -- which, though unstated, appear to be compared with similar data from the first three months of 1995 -- the mailing states that rapes in the county increased by 50 percent and homicides by 100 percent, among other statistics.

While these percentages are large, said county State's Attorney Marna McLendon, the increases in the numbers of crimes were small.

For example, she said, homicides increased from none to one from the first three months of 1995 to the same period this year. Rapes increased from six to nine in the same comparative periods.

"There's much more to the numbers than the {mailing} shows," McLendon said. "I'm in the business of looking at crime stats, and the mailing is absolutely misleading."

But Republican state Del. Robert L. Flanagan, a key adviser to the Gelfman-Smith ticket, said the mailing gives a "fair representation of crime in Howard County."

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Caption:  
PHOTO 1  
PHOTO 2

NewsBank, inc.

Caption: Claims inaccuracies: Circuit Judge Diane O. Leasure says challengers' mailing contains inaccuracies about her sentencing.  
No response: District Judge Lenore R. Gelfman's running mate said it was inappropriate for her "to respond to personal attacks."

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