



“No Vacancy” for Republican hopefuls for Madison County Associate Judgeship

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Madison County GOP Chair Jeremy Plank called the selection of associate judges in Madison County a complete waste of time for any Republican hoping to get the nod. “It seems to me that the Democrat circuit judges may as well have a “No Vacancy” sign for conservatives posted on their office walls”, said Plank. “It is becoming increasingly difficult to get Republican lawyers to even apply for associate judgeships because most of them see it as a futile effort.”

9 circuit judges make up the Third Judicial Circuit; 8 of whom are democrats. The 9 circuit judges vote in a secret ballot to select 13 associate judges. Only 5 votes are needed for a successful Associate candidate to be appointed. “The circuit judges post the openings and pretend to make their selection in a non-partisan fashion. Honestly, it’s just window dressing” said Plank. “The truth is that the Democrat party endorses associate judge candidates and then their judges rubber-stamp the wishes of the political machine.”

Republican County board member Mike Walters who serves as chairman of the Judiciary Committee says he shares the concerns of Plank. “We have bent over backwards to work with the judiciary to add more balance and diversity of opinion to the court. When I tell people that only 2 of 22 judges in the Circuit are Republicans, even Democrats are shocked” said Walters.

“Republican circuit judge, David Dugan’s associate judge application was passed over repeatedly despite later being unanimously selected by the Illinois Supreme Court to fill the vacancy of Judge John Barberis, and later handily winning the election in 2018,” said GOP Chairman Jeremy Plank. “The last time a Republican associate judge was appointed was in 2006. It’s hard to believe that in a county where Republicans are in the majority, less than 10% of the judges are Republicans. The party has stayed out of retention campaigns in the past. However, we may re-evaluate this, if the tone-deafness continues.”

In 2015, five associate judge openings occurred simultaneously when the nine circuit judges refused to reappoint five of the 13 associate judges to a new term. Nearly 50 candidates, including several highly respected Republican lawyers, applied for the vacancies. No Republican was chosen for any of those five openings. Last year there were two Associate Judge vacancies and both were filled by attorneys who were active in the Madison County Democrat Party and employed by plaintiff's law firms.

"If our county is going to shake its reputation as a judicial hellhole the judiciary needs more balance. Two Republican judges out of 22 total does not reflect the political makeup of a county with a Republican majority," said Walters.

"I find it troubling that Republican applicants for associate judge have been passed over now 18 times in a row, with only two appointments in the past 24 years and none in the past 13 years," said Plank. "It seems that nearly all of the associate judges appointed in the past 13 years have come from either the State's Attorney's office or one of the local plaintiff's firms owned by wealthy democrat attorneys. Republicans are grossly underrepresented on the bench in Madison County and our elected circuit judges need to use these vacancies to show that they value balance and diversity of thought in our court system."