

Carolyn Nichols runs for Common Pleas bench



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Former Minority Business Enterprise Council chief promises respect if elected



Attorney Carolyn Nichols, center, running as a Democrat, hopes to capture one of 10 vacancies for Common Pleas Court judge. Shown is State Rep. Ron Waters, left, and State Rep. Thaddeus Kirkland. — TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

Attorney Carolyn Nichols, former head of the Minority Business Enterprise Council, has launched a campaign for Common Pleas Court judge.

"I believe that people coming into the court system deserve to be treated with respect, fairness and equality under the law," she said. "And, that a judge must listen to all sides and then render decisions based on a thorough knowledge of the law and common sense."

Nichols, 54, is running as a Democrat and hopes to capture one of 10 vacancies expected in court. First, city's voters much approve her in the May 8 primary.

In Philadelphia, judges will share the ballot with candidates for council and mayor, which often steal the limelight.

"A lot of the focus will be on the mayoral election, but as I say to everybody, the mayor can't put people in jail, a judge can," she said. "So we need to pay attention, particularly in our community, to who we put on the bench."

A well-known attorney who has held a variety of public jobs that range from deputy secretary of external affairs and city attorney to counsel for the Philadelphia Parking Authority, she may be best know for her role as director of MBEC from 2006 to 2008.

That long and varied history will serve her well on the bench, Nichols said.

"I have a history. I don't have to guess how to manage in a public sector environment," she said. "My whole career has been about making a difference. I have a long experience and a passion for public service. The majority of my career has been in public service. I will take that same passion and put it in the bench."

As a judge, Nichols said she would work to make the courts more accessible.

"Rightly or wrongly, the public views the justice system in terms of their experiences (which) influence their trust, or lack thereof, in the justice system," she said. "The judiciary should be in touch with the needs of the communities they serve. We need to have people on the bench that understand and respect and are sensitive to all backgrounds."

Like every other branch of government, the judiciary is facing a severe budget crunch.

"The issues go on, but the court is under such a crunch," she said, referring back to her public service career. "I know what its like to function within an environment of constraint, having been in city government, having been under the pressure of ever-decreasing budgets."

Anyone seeking public office now is bound to encounter a very polarized electorate, according to Nichols, noting the recent shooting of Arizona Rep. Gabrielle Giffords. In that atmosphere, building bridges is important, Nichols said, adding that she has a history of such activity through work with the NAACP, Taller Puertorriqueno, and her founding of a forum for Black and Jewish women to meet and talk through the American Jewish Committee.

"Diversity, inclusion, intercultural dialogue are important," she said. "A lot of times we form ideas about groups of people because we're not exposed to those groups of people on a personal level."

Overall, Nichols said her experience and attitude would serve Philadelphians well.

"I bring a perspective of pushing through doors, of not giving up, of being persistent and of having a positive outlook," she said.

Nichols has an MBA from Eastern University, a master of law in trial advocacy, a Juris Doctorate, and bachelor of fine arts degree from Temple.

She is the 3rd Ward's Democratical committeeperson. She lives in West Philadelphia, where she was born and raised. She is a graduate of Overbrook High School.

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