

Judicial candidates must attend campaign finance and ethics seminar June 8

May 28, 2015

The Special Committee on Judicial Election Campaign Intervention will conduct a seminar at 1 p.m. June 8 to educate judicial candidates about campaign finance rules and ethics. The seminar will be held in the first floor meeting room at the Supreme Court at 450 High Street.

The Code of Judicial Conduct requires judicial candidates and judicial election committee chairpersons to attend the two-hour course on campaign practices, finance and ethics approved by the Special Committee.

Attorney John G. Corlew, chairman of the Special Committee, and Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. will make opening remarks at 1 p.m. The agenda is as follows:

- 1:15 p.m., Assistant Secretary of State for Elections Kimberly P. Turner will talk about campaign finance disclosure;
- 2 p.m., Commission on Judicial Performance Executive Director Darlene Ballard will talk about ethical considerations in judicial campaigns under Canon 5 of the Code of Judicial Conduct;
- 2:45 p.m., Corlew will moderate a question and answer session.

The Supreme Court created the Special Committee and the mandatory education program for judicial candidates in a 2002 revision to the Code of Judicial Conduct. Canon 5 F says that the Special Committee's responsibility "shall be to issue advisory opinions and to deal expeditiously with allegations of ethical misconduct in campaigns for judicial office....The objective of the Special Committee shall be to alleviate unethical and unfair campaign practices in judicial elections...."

The five-member committee can offer advisory opinions and investigate complaints of judicial campaign conduct. If the Special Committee finds evidence of some campaigning impropriety, it may issue a confidential cease-and-desist request to the candidate. If a cease-and-desist request is disregarded or if unethical or unfair campaign practices continue, the Special Committee may issue a public statement about violations. If campaign conduct appears to violate an election law or a canon of the Code of Judicial Conduct, the matter will be turned over to the Commission on Judicial Performance.

The Special Committee is required to act within 10 days of receipt of a complaint, unless it's within the final days of a campaign. If a complaint arises within 10 days of election day, the special committee must act within 36 hours.

The Code of Judicial Conduct requires appointment of the Special Committee during each year in which a judicial election is to be held. Three new chancellors and four new circuit judges will be chosen during the Nov. 3 election. The new judgeships were created by the 2015 Legislature. One new judgeship each was created in the Fourth Chancery of Amite, Franklin, Pike and Walthall counties; the 11th Chancery of Holmes, Leake, Madison and Yazoo counties; and the 20th Chancery of Rankin County. One new judgeship each was added to the 12th Circuit of Forrest and Perry counties; the 13th Circuit of Covington, Jasper, Simpson and Smith counties; the 15th Circuit of Jefferson Davis, Lamar, Lawrence, Marion and Pearl River counties; and the 20th Circuit of Madison and Rankin counties.

The Supreme Court finalized the attorney appointments in an order issued May 18. Corlew, of Jackson, was appointed by Chief Justice Waller. Other members are Powell G. Ogletree Jr. of Ridgeland, appointed by Gov. Phil Bryant; George B. Pickett of Jackson, appointed by Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves; Bradley F. Hathaway of Greenville, appointed by House Speaker Philip Gunn; and former Mississippi Bar President Robert R. Bailess of Vicksburg, appointed by Commission on Judicial Performance Chairman Lee J. Howard.

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