Candidates face their pasts in Court of Appeal race

Three Republican women, Vanessa Waguespack Anseman, Candyce Gagnard Perret and Susan Theall, are candidates in the race to occupy the vacant seat left on the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeal because Judge James “Jimmy” Genovese was elected to the Louisiana Supreme Court.

The 3rd Circuit Court is the largest of the five Louisiana circuit courts. Its jurisdiction consists of 21 parishes, but this election is for District 3, which encompasses Acadia, Allen, Iberia, Lafayette, Evangeline, St. Landry, St. Martin and Vermilion parishes.

Twelve judges serve on the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeal, which is based in Lake Charles.

The election is this Saturday, March 25. If none of the three receives a majority, a runoff will be held April 29.

The campaigns have been fraught with controversy involving all three candidates. Anseman’s eligibility was questioned and sent to court. It has been reported Perret was arrested in 2004 and threatened the arresting officer, as well as stalked her ex-boyfriend the next year. Theall has been accused of disguising a $300,000 donation as a loan during her 2011 race for district judge.

“This is truly one of the more bizarre races in Louisiana judicial history, with enough twists and turns to satisfy even those with the most baroque taste for political drama,” observed Pearson Cross, Ph.D., associate dean of the College of Liberal Arts and a political science professor. “Usually judge races, and particularly races for appellate court seats, are sleepy affairs with the focus on the good character and high moral standing of the candidates.”

Asks the UL Lafayette students should be interested in this race, Cross replied. “All elections are important. They are key to the legitimacy of our democracy and our faith in our public institutions. Nowhere is this adage truer than in races for judicial seats. In terms of what impact an appeals courts judge will have on student lives, it is unclear. Yet, they are an important judicial institution that decides cases that have far-reaching effects. You just never know how important one election might be in that regard.”

Devin Cochran
NAME: Vanessa Anseman
AGE: 38
PARTY: Republican
HOMETOWN: Baton Rouge
OCCUPATION: Attorney; full-time homemaker
EDUCATION: B.A. from Louisiana State University, 2000; J.D. from Louisiana State University, Paul M. Hebert Law Center, 2003

Anseman said no matter what, she will be fair and just if elected.

“I am beholden to no politician, am in no one’s back pocket and I’m not running anyone’s agenda,” she said. “I am running because I believe in what I am saying and know that my message resonates with the voters. My opponents believe that their attempts to thwart my campaign based on ‘fake news’ and ‘fake law’ will confuse the voters who won’t be able to make heads or tails of it. I know better.”

In discussing how her message resonates with voters, Anseman reflected on a time she attended a Lady Dems meeting, an organization for women Democrats, which she called “an enormous win” for her despite the experience being “terrifying/intimidating.”

Earl Taylor, the St. Landry district attorney, filed a suit against Anseman about her eligibility to run in the election. She submitted an appeal on Tuesday, March 14. She was granted her appeal.

Anseman previously practiced law at Liskow & Lewis in Lafayette. She left her job in 2013 to take care of her sick father, who later passed away. Currently, Anseman describes herself as a full-time homemaker.

Kailey Broussard
NAME: Candyce Perret
AGE: 46
PARTY: Republican
HOMETOWN: Marksville
OCCUPATION: Attorney; general counsel and co-owner of The Perret Group, LLC
EDUCATION: Bachelor’s from the University of Denver in 1992, J.D. from Loyola University New Orleans Law School in 1997

Marie Centanni, Perret’s campaign manager, did not make Perret available for an interview for this profile, despite multiple calls and emails.

Perret’s campaign has also declined multiple invitations to forums and debates, including one held Tuesday by the University of Louisiana at Lafayette’s Society of Professional Journalists, the state’s professional SPJ chapter and the Acadiana Press Club.

“Any candidate for elected office should be transparent with the media and the general public,” said Jason Maloy, Ph.D., a political science professor at UL Lafayette, in an email. “Failing to show up for a public forum this close to an election is bad form.”

The Independent and the Daily Iberian reported in early March that Perret was arrested in 2004 in Walton County, Florida, on a charge of indecent exposure. According to the offense report, Perret warned police that she was an assistant district attorney who had experience handling civil cases for false arrests. Perret never held the position of assistant district attorney, although she once served as a city prosecutor in Marksville.

Kendrick Cooper
Special to The Vermilion
NAME: Susan Theall
AGE: 60
PARTY: Republican
HOMETOWN: Jennings
OCCUPATION: Attorney; family court judge
EDUCATION: B.A., University of Southwestern Louisiana (now UL Lafayette), 1980; J.D., Loyola University New Orleans, 1985

Susan Theall said in an interview on campus on March 14 that she leads a campaign that stresses the importance of experience and qualifications. Of the three candidates, she said, she is the only one who knows “what it is like being a lawyer in the middle of a trial” and being “a judge in the middle of a trial.”

Theall also mentioned establishing the only self-representation court in Louisiana, which allowed people who couldn’t afford court fees, or a lawyer, to represent themselves in court.

“What most normal people want is to simply have their say with the judge,” Theall said.

Asked how she would keep her personal opinions out of the court when deciding on a ruling, she said, “As a judge, you learn very quickly that your personal opinions don’t matter. Your opinions are based solely on the facts in front of you, the evidence that’s presented and the law. A judge’s role is to be as impartial as possible, pick back and look at the facts that were presented and to apply the law.”

Theall has practiced law for 31 years. She was elected as a judge for the 15th Judicial District in 2011.