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Our Voice: Fearing is obvious choice for Appeals Court

The Tri-City Herald Editorial Board will hold more than 20 interview sessions this election season with candidates vying for our endorsement. After the interviews, members of the editorial board discuss each candidate's merits. Sometimes, reaching a consensus on who to recommend can be difficult.

But sometimes there's a candidate so well suited for the position that even the person's opponent acknowledges the superior qualifications. That makes the decision much easier.

Such is the case for Judge George Fearing, who is running for re-election for state Appeals Court Division III, District 2.

The Washington Court of Appeals is a court designed to take some of the burden off of the state Supreme Court. The state is broken into three divisions, with our area represented by Division III in Spokane. The court hears appeals from the Superior Courts, and orders that effectively eliminate further litigation such as the termination of parental rights and juvenile court proceedings.

That means a lot of reading of lower court decisions and forming written opinions. Fearing, who was appointed to the position in 2013 and elected in November of that year, enjoys the work and loves to read the decisions and write his opinions into the kind of prose any layman can understand. And that is a special skill indeed. Often, reading an opinion of a court can be frustrating and require a thesaurus.

Fearing, who was an attorney in private practice in Kennewick for 30 years and handled 90 appeals cases before becoming a judge, says he treats every case like it's the most important in the world, because it is to that person. And we believe him.

His sincerity and determination to do what is right by the law now make him a stellar judge, one who is highly recommended by peers and other litigators across the state.

The race is a nonpartisan one, meaning that judges are not supposed to declare a political affiliation in the contest. But Fearing's challenger, Patrick McBurney, hopes to cash in on his party affiliation anyway, without technically violating that campaign rule.

McBurney, who has practiced law in the Tri-Cities for 23 years, acknowledges that Fearing is the better candidate and says he's not going to win based on qualifications. But McBurney believes voters deserve to have two candidates to choose from, and he also believes his political affiliation — though not stated outright — could take him to victory. His campaign signs proclaim him "A Conservative Voice," and his party affiliation is obvious.

Fearing says a judge is about being above politics. We agree. We don't need poorly qualified judges sitting on the bench just because they found a way to skirt the law and ride partisanship to a political victory.

We disagree with his tactics but do agree on one thing: Fearing is, by far, the most qualified candidate.

The Tri-City Herald recommends Judge George Fearing for re-election to the state Appeals Court.