



Newly sworn-in Washington State Supreme Court Justice Steve Gonzalez waves to the House gallery after his introduction Tuesday before Gov. Chris Gregoire's State of the State address in 2012. Steve Bloom - Olympian file photo

OPINION

Retain Gonzalez on state Supreme Court

BY SEATTLE TIMES EDITORIAL BOARD

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Washington voters have no choice but to re-elect the three state Supreme Court justices running for re-election this year.

Fortunately the incumbents, Susan Owens, Sheryl McCloud and Steve Gonzalez, are all eminently qualified.

While there may be various points of disagreement with each, they are members of a strong, feisty and productive panel that's also active in efforts to improve the judicial system statewide, address bias and broaden participation.

Generations of Washingtonians should benefit from the current justices' firm hand in education reform, which forced Gov. Jay Inslee and legislators to finally fulfill their constitutional obligation to amply fund public schools via the McCleary case.

Only Gonzalez faces a challenge on the ballot, from Nathan Choi, a Bellevue attorney. Choi is not a reasonable option. He failed to abide by state campaign disclosure rules during a 2017 run for appellate judge and appears to be doing so again this year. He was also admonished by the King County Bar Association for falsely describing himself as a judge in campaign ads last fall.

Gonzalez, a former federal prosecutor and King County Superior Court judge, was appointed justice in 2011 and elected in 2012. While this board is concerned that Gonzalez may not be a strong advocate for public records, especially in a pending case in which the Legislature is seeking special treatment to be less transparent than other public agencies, he is nevertheless a high-performing justice deserving voters' support.

Owens and McCloud initially faced challengers, but they were unqualified and won't appear on the Nov. 6 ballot.

The dearth of challengers is disappointing. Even if incumbents are the best choice, they need to be pressed to defend their records and explain to voters why they deserve another six-year term. The court could also benefit from more geographic diversity since it serves the entire state. It now has two nonwhite members and six of nine justices are women, but justices are almost entirely from the Puget Sound region.

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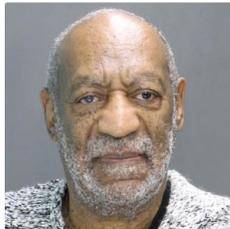
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