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Senators say political ties to Lancaster County Court of Common Pleas candidates won't affect their decision



SAM JANESCH | Staff Writer Jan 30, 2018



Lancaster County state Sens. Ryan Aument and Scott Martin.

Two Republican state senators deliberating on who to suggest for a [Lancaster County judge appointment](#) have long-standing political ties with multiple candidates they're considering.

Through campaign work, financial contributions and operating alongside each other within the Republican Committee of Lancaster County, state Sens. Ryan Aument and Scott Martin have been closely involved with some of the [10 attorneys and public officials they are vetting](#) for a judicial vacancy.

Aument and Martin have pledged to conduct an open and transparent process.



Here are the applications for 10 candidates vying for a Lancaster County judge appointment

SAM JANESCH | Staff Writer

They said in an interview Monday that previous or existing relationships with the candidates will not affect their decision on who to recommend to Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf, who will nominate someone to fill the upcoming Court of Common Pleas vacancy being created by Judge Jay J. Hoberg's retirement this week.

Interested candidates can also submit applications directly to the governor's office, though his spokesman said he will take into advisement the senators' suggestion.

"We are going to make a decision to support someone based on the good work they have done and what their qualifications are," said Martin, of Martic Township.

In contrast to what has typically been a **closed-door process** in the past, Martin and Aument, of Landisville, recently released the **names and applications** of the 10 candidates.

Three-term District Attorney Craig Stedman, the most high-profile name on the list, has received or given campaign contributions to Aument and Martin going back to at least 2011, according to campaign finance reports.

Stedman also served as Martin's "campaign chairman" in 2015-16, helping him get elected to the 13th Senate District after his two terms as county commissioner.

"The idea that their political involvement or the amount of money they have contributed — the idea that that is going influence the outcome of this process, it's false and frankly offensive."

Stedman's financial contributions to them include \$400 to Martin's campaign in October 2016 and \$300 to Aument's 2012 state House bid. Both were relatively small sums within Aument and Martin's large fundraising operations.

Last year, when Stedman was running for Superior Court, Aument and Martin each gave \$5,000 to his campaign. Martin also gave Stedman a \$300 contribution in August 2011.

Martin, Aument and Stedman were all elected to county-wide public offices for the first time in 2007.

Martin said his relationship with Stedman goes back to the 1990s and that he's also known other people on the list for several years.

Aument said, "There are some that I've worked with more than others but each and every individual on the list I've had some contact with previously or a member of my staff has some contact with previously."

That will have no bearing, though, on his vetting of the candidates, he added.

"The idea that their political involvement or the amount of money they have contributed — the idea that that is going influence the outcome of this process, it's false and frankly offensive," Aument said.



LOCAL NEWS

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Contributions

Other candidates in consideration include District Judge Jayne Duncan, Senior Deputy Attorney General William Stoycos, and attorneys Crystal Clark, Shawn McLaughlin, JoAnne Murphy, Chris Patterson, John Pyfer, Gerald Robinson and John Stengel.

Murphy, who also sought the party endorsement for a similar vacancy last year, gave both senators \$500 contributions last spring. Martin's campaign committee also received \$850 from Clark since 2015 and \$100 from Patterson in September 2017, according to campaign finance documents.

Clark is a former county solicitor whose job was to defend Martin and the rest of county government while he was a commissioner. She also served as vice chair of the Republican Committee of Lancaster County at the time when Martin was running for state Senate.

Patterson also had a leadership role in the party committee, serving as the Manheim Township GOP chairman for the last four years.



POLITICS

District Attorney Craig Stedman, District Judge Jayne Duncan among 9 names considered for Court of Common Pleas judge

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Concerns about process

While several candidates have served as Republican committee members — including Stedman from 2005-16 — one person looking for the appointment clearly stated in her application that she believed politics was the reason she was previously passed over for county judge.

Duncan, an Elizabethtown magisterial district judge since 1991, has twice asked the Republican Committee of Lancaster County for its powerful endorsement but did not receive it.

In her letter to the senators for the new appointment, she wrote that she was “highly recommended” by the Lancaster Bar Association both times but the party went with someone who had been “politically active” — which she was barred from doing by judicial ethics policy.

"In a perfect world, political affiliation would have nothing to do with decisions about our judges and justices."

“Unfortunately, the background and experience that made me a viable candidate, also prevented me from garnering party support,” she wrote to Aument and Martin.

Maida Milone, president and CEO of Pennsylvanians For Modern Courts, said legal experience, fairness, integrity, community involvement and a commitment to continuing legal education are factors that should be considered in judicial appointments and elections.

“In a perfect world, political affiliation would have nothing to do with decisions about our judges and justices,” said Milone, whose group is nonprofit and nonpartisan.

“Everybody says to me, ‘Well it's not a perfect system.’ And I always say, ‘Where there are human beings involved there will be politics involved.’ But we need to generally have a system in place that eliminates as much of that as possible.”



Senators pick District Attorney Craig Stedman to recommend for Lancaster County court vacancy