

Judicial Votes Count!

By Amy B. Koorn

Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor kicked off the 2015 Election on Sept. 1, 2015 with an education initiative for voters that provides candidates' biographies as well as job descriptions for the Court office they seek. The website, blogs.uakron.edu/judicialvotescount, is hosted by the University of Akron Bliss Institute of Applied Politics and by its very name, conveys the Chief Justice's sentiments on the important role she believes judges have.

"Judges make decisions that affect our lives every day and in countless ways. That's why we should care about whom we elect to serve as judges. Judicial Votes Count is a nonpartisan partnership committed to providing you, the Ohio voter, with everything you need to make informed choices about judicial candidates, including why the candidate is running, their legal experience and what judges do."¹

The initiative is straightforward. The Judicial Votes Counts site aims to educate voters who otherwise are unfamiliar with the candidates or the function the judges serve, with the purpose of making voters feel comfortable casting their votes. According to the site survey, confusion and lack of knowledge account for the bulk of missing judicial votes. But, the Chief aims to change this through education and communication.

In a recent interview with the Chief Justice, she offered some feedback on the success of the site. Unequivocally, the Chief Justice viewed the effort as a "great" first year but noted there is room to tweak the site for the upcoming 2016 election cycle where there will be three Supreme Court races on the ballot, including her own. In reflecting on the work that lies ahead, the Chief Justice readily acknowledged the biggest hurdle she and the site's partners – the League of Women Voters, the Bliss Institute, the Ohio State Bar Association, the Ohio Newspaper Association and the Ohio Association of Broadcasters – have is to get the word out that the site exists and make voters aware of its offerings.

In 2015, the Chief took to the airwaves, speaking on radio talk shows and giving television interviews in Columbus and Cleveland. She also publicized it through print media, by writing Op-Eds that ran all Ohio's major newspapers as well as local publications. She is grateful for the attention the media collectively provided and knows that a lot more is necessary. To that end, she hopes to team with other candidates, particularly those who have high voter turn-out, like the Senate and Congressional races, to ensure heightened awareness and increased site traffic. In an effort to show support for all branches of the government, she hopes even the Top of the Ticket lends his support for the site and all that it represents.

In terms of numbers, Judicial Votes Count website captured 10,570 unique visits between Sept. 1, 2015 and Nov. 3, 2015. Site visits spiked at 9 a.m. on Election Day with 240 visits, Accumulating 2,033 visits over the course of the day. In total, the site was viewed 12,761 times, meaning some visitors went to the site more than once. Of those who looked at the site, there were 60,525 pages viewed. In other words, of the roughly 10,000 people who went to the website, each viewer

looked at six different pages within the site. The "Know Your Candidates" page, which listed the candidates with links to their respective bios, received 32 percent of the views and was the most frequently visited page. Geographically, 28 percent of the views came from Columbus voters, 5 percent from Cincinnati voters, 4.6 percent from Akron and 4.02 percent from Cleveland.

For comparison purposes, the Columbus Bar Association's website, www.cbalaw.com, had 154,150 visits in 2015 from 77,851 unique visitors and page views totaled 451,010. For the mathematically challenged readers, that translates to three page views for each visit to the site. To compare apples to apples, on average the Columbus Bar's site garners 12,846 visits per month – two thousand more than the Judicial Votes Count site received for the entire time it was available. While those numbers show the site's popularity has room for improvement, the Chief Justice was pleased for the inaugural effort and will continue to support the effort to not only make this the preferred resource for voter information on judges but also convince voters why these elections should matter to them. To that end, there is a role each of us can play in educating the electorate.

Regardless of whether your practice includes appearances before judges, we are all officers of the court. At one point, we all took an oath administered by one of the Justices and, for one reason or another, it was a momentous occasion. Clearly, we have all experienced the power, the importance and the significance that the judiciary has on our lives. Now, multiply that by the number of appearances made every day before judges across the state, at all levels, on all types of cases, and we can begin to appreciate the Chief's initiative. As the title suggests, Judicial Votes Count. To the extent the general electorate does not know enough about the candidates to cast a vote and we as lawyers know how much judges matter, do we not owe it to our profession to communicate the meaningfulness of the opportunity to elect the individuals tasked with applying the law? As the Chief remarked, "It is such an important position, be it a traffic ticket, a child custody dispute or a probate matter. Judges affect so many lives in very fundamental ways; the people who are impacted need to be involved in electing their judges."

¹ blogs.uakron.edu/judicialvotes-count/why-judicial-votes-count-2/



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