

## **JUDICIAL RACES - 2014**

### **Responses of Minnesota Supreme Court Justice Wilhelmina “Mimi” Wright**

The judicial system is facing increasing cost pressures. Other than more money, what steps can be taken to increase efficiency in the courts and still afford individuals due process under the law?

**This is a concern to which the Judicial Branch has devoted many resources and made significant progress in recent years. Providing every individual—no matter their circumstances—with the best possible access to justice is crucial to both increasing efficiency and affording due process under law to all.**

**In recent years, we have been expanding self-help services to assist the growing number of people proceeding without a lawyer, and Minnesota’s courts are recognized nationally for these efforts. In 2013, more than 37,000 people received assistance from walk-in Self-Help Centers in Hennepin County alone.**

**Taking advantage of technological capabilities is another important way to increase and simplify individuals’ access to justice. We have made great strides in this area. There were more than one million visits to our Self-Help Center website in 2013, which is a 127 percent increase over the number of visits in 2008. In addition, Self-Help Center staff members have converted hundreds of court forms into PDFs, making it easier for the public to fill out forms and ensure that the information provided is legible.**

**Similarly, our electronic “e-filing” system has improved access and efficiencies in the handling of both criminal and civil cases, ensuring that individuals are afforded due process and that their cases are handled in a timely and efficient manner. Moreover, improvements to online access to records through the Minnesota Court Information System (MNCIS) also have had a favorable impact on administration efficiencies, and those improvements continue.**

**I believe that a sustained commitment to improving and expanding these and similar innovations will help Minnesota maintain a quality justice system that is fair, efficient, and affords due process to all.**

Do you support the judicial retention election system as recommended by the Quie Commission?

**This is not an issue on which I am campaigning, but I do appreciate the opportunity to respond to your question. The Quie Commission’s recommendation that Minnesota**

**change its system of selecting judges to retention elections would require an amendment to the Minnesota Constitution. No such ballot issue has been authorized by the Legislature, so that question is not before the voters this fall. I firmly believe that judges must remain impartial, and judges must not mislead voters with promises that the judge will rule a certain way in certain types of cases or with respect to particular issues. I believe that no matter what system we use to select judges, Minnesotans deserve judges who have the qualifications, experience, integrity, and character to serve in a fair and impartial manner. Most Minnesota judges, myself included, have gone through a merit-based judicial selection commission before being appointed by the Governor. Because I respect Minnesota voters, it is my goal to educate Minnesota voters about my professional experience and my character so that voters can cast an informed vote in this judicial election.**

Should political parties endorse judicial candidates?

**No. I have not sought the endorsement of any political party. I have agreed to abide by the campaign practices advanced by the Minnesota State Bar Association's Affirmation Regarding Responsible Campaign Conduct, which specifically disavows using political party endorsements in judicial campaigns. I believe it is important to maintain the impartiality and independence necessary to perform the duties with which I am charged. The judicial oath requires that I administer justice to all parties in a fair and nonpartisan manner. Because I am required to keep an open mind on issues or matters that may come before me in court, I cannot and will not serve as a spokesperson for political interests.**

Do you intend to seek endorsement and/or financial contributions from special-interest groups? If so, which organizations/individuals have endorsed you?

**I do not intend to seek endorsement from issue-oriented special interest groups. I appreciate the support of groups that are interested in having well-qualified judges serving in our courts and that understand the importance of judges remaining impartial and unbiased. Without my request to do so, a large group of appellate lawyers, who regularly appear in Minnesota's appellate courts and are in a unique position to assess the qualifications of judicial candidates, have given me their endorsement. I also have sought the endorsement of the Academy of Certified Trial Lawyers of Minnesota, which is an association of lawyers from all sides of the bar (representing plaintiffs and defendants alike). These are lawyers who regularly appear in court and value impartial, qualified judges. Information about these and other supporters can be found on my campaign website: [www.WrightforJustice.com](http://www.WrightforJustice.com).**

Why are you running for office? What are your personal priorities?

**I am running for office because I enjoy serving the people of Minnesota as a Justice on the Minnesota Supreme Court, and I would be honored to continue this important public service. I also believe that I have the combination of experience, work ethic, sound judgment, and dedication to public service necessary to serve effectively as a Justice on Minnesota's Supreme Court.**

**From my experience, I know that serving as a Minnesota Supreme Court Justice is a challenging job and a serious responsibility. It also is one of the most rewarding responsibilities that I have ever had. Community involvement, civic education, and civic leadership are among my personal priorities. I am honored to serve the public in a position that incorporates these important values. I enjoy every aspect of my work on the Court, and I hope that the voters agree that my continuing my public service is beneficial to the people of Minnesota.**

**I also believe that I am well qualified to serve as a Minnesota Supreme Court Justice. I have been thoroughly screened by three separate, independent, merit-based judicial selection commissions. Each of these commissions recommended me for service as a judge. I have more than 25 years of legal experience that includes serving as a trial judge, an appellate court judge, a federal prosecutor, and a private litigation attorney. I am the first and only person in the history of our State to serve Minnesota as a judge at all three levels of the state judiciary.**

**I have a substantial record as a judge that is publicly available for anyone to review. My past experience and record demonstrate that I am a person of integrity, that I work hard, and that I exercise sound judgment. Throughout my 14 years as a judge, I have worked on behalf of the people of Minnesota to promote fairness and equal justice for all. I care deeply about the quality of our justice system and equal access to the courts. I am courteous and treat others with respect and civility. I am committed to being impartial in both my conduct and decision-making. I strongly believe that every interaction a person has with our justice system should inspire confidence in our fairness and integrity.**

**I bring to the Minnesota Supreme Court a unique combination of exemplary experience and a dedication to public service. I hope that the people of Minnesota conclude that these qualities make me an ideal Minnesota Supreme Court Justice and worthy of their vote.**

Briefly summarize your personal background and qualifications.

**Employment Background:**

**Since 2012, I have served as a Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court. My responsibilities include analyzing and deciding cases in all areas of the law that are within the jurisdiction of the Minnesota Supreme Court. To perform these responsibilities, I participate in oral arguments, deliberate on legal issues with colleagues, and write opinions. I also serve as the Supreme Court liaison to the Minnesota Judicial Council Committee for Equality and**

**Justice, the Legal Services Advisory Committee, the Advisory Committee for the General Rules of Practice, the Minnesota Continuing Legal Education Board, the Second Judicial District, and the Seventh Judicial District.**

**From 2002 to 2012, I served as a Judge on the Minnesota Court of Appeals. My responsibilities included analyzing and deciding appeals in all areas of the law over which the Minnesota Court of Appeals has jurisdiction. I participated in oral argument, deliberated with my colleagues, and prepared written opinions. I also served on the Minnesota Judicial Council and the Committee for Equality and Justice.**

**From 2000 to 2002, I served as a Judge of the District Court in the Second Judicial District, Ramsey County. My responsibilities included presiding over cases in all areas of the law, conducting jury trials, hearing motions, deciding legal issues, and preparing written opinions. I also served on several committees, including the Minnesota Supreme Court Public Trust and Confidence Committee.**

**From 1995 to 2000, I served as an Assistant U.S. Attorney at the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Minnesota. I prosecuted violent crimes and complex fraud cases on behalf of the United States of America. My work included representing the United States in the U.S. District Court in pretrial proceedings, jury trials, and on appeal at the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit. I was awarded the United States Department of Justice Special Achievement Award in 1997 and the United States Department of Justice Director's Award in 2000.**

**From 1991 to 1995, I worked as a litigation attorney at Hogan & Hartson, LLP, in Washington, D.C. As an attorney in the education and litigation practice groups, I primarily represented school districts across the nation seeking to enhance educational opportunities for public school students. I appeared in federal trial courts and the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit.**

**From 1989 to 1991, I was a Law Clerk for the Honorable Damon J. Keith, United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit. My responsibilities included legal research, legal analysis and writing, and advising on criminal and civil matters.**

**Educational Background:**

**I graduated from Yale University in 1986, earning my Bachelor of Arts Degree in Literature.**

**I graduated from Harvard Law School in 1989, earning my Juris Doctorate.**

**Civic Engagement:**

**I am involved in my community. I have served on the William Mitchell College of Law Board of Trustees, the Board of Directors of the Girl Scout Council of Saint Croix Valley, the Ramsey County Community Corrections Advisory Committee, and the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra Board of Directors. I have received the Fidelis Apparitor Award from the College of Saint Benedict, the Myra Bradwell Award from Minnesota Women Lawyers, the Lena O. Smith Achievement Award from the Minnesota Black Women Lawyers Network, the B. Warren Hart Award for Public Service from the Saint Paul Jaycees, and the Ten Outstanding Young Minnesotans Award.**

**I have served as an adjunct professor at the University of Saint Thomas School of Law and lectured at graduate schools in Belgium and Switzerland on judicial selection and judicial accountability in the United States.**

**Additional information about my background and qualifications can be found on my campaign website: [www.WrightforJustice.com](http://www.WrightforJustice.com).**