



# We recommend

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We're not wild about partisan elections to select Texas judges. Are there distinct Republican and Democratic brands of criminal justice?

So we're not troubled that two former Republicans are seeking Democratic nominations for two Dallas County felony benches. We would hope voters would agree that one ex-Republican is an excellent judge, regardless of party, and the other, well, not so much.

Criminal District Court No. 4

John Creuzot, on the bench since the early 1990s, is a hardworking, innovative judge with widespread respect across the legal and political spectrum. He is an easy choice over Hiram McBeth in the Democratic primary.

Judge Creuzot's best-known innovation is the successful DIVERT court program, which directs people into special care programs instead of jail. More recently, the 50-year-old judge pushed for DNA tests that ultimately freed wrongly convicted Charles Allen Chatman after 27 years.

However, his return to the Democrats is a major point of contention for Mr. McBeth, 56, a defense lawyer seeking office for the first time. He says Judge Creuzot is "not the right choice for the Democratic Party of Dallas County," saying party affiliation is important on the bench.

Mr. McBeth calls himself a "true Democrat" and Judge Creuzot a "double flip-flopper," a Democrat who went Republican and then back. Mr. McBeth also leveled clumsy, evidence-free charges that Judge Creuzot has impeded minority lawyers from getting appointments to his court, which the judge denies.

Neither allegation speaks well to Mr. McBeth's judgment. Judge Creuzot, on the other hand, has demonstrated leadership in his court and deserves the party nomination.

Criminal District Court No. 2

The other former Republican is ex-judge Larry Baraka, a lawyer in private practice since his election defeat in the mid-1990s.

He surprised many party officials by filing to challenge incumbent Judge Don Adams, who won this bench in 2004, two years ahead of the county's big Democratic wave at the courthouse.

Judge Adams, 59, is regarded as a hard-working, reasonable and fair judge. That latter quality might explain why prosecutors and defense attorneys alike praise him.

He inherited a court with a high cost-per-disposition ratio and lowered it to one of the best by handling more pleas and jury trials.

By contrast, Mr. Baraka experienced declining Dallas Bar Association evaluations in his 12 years on the bench. Some say his ego got him in trouble; others say he was imperial and inconsistent on the bench.

This was not a particularly close call, either. Democrats would be wise to stick with Judge Adams in this court.