



JUDICIAL MERIT SELECTION COMMISSION
Sworn Statement to be included in Transcript of Public Hearings

Circuit Court
(New Candidate)

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1. Why do you want to serve as a Circuit Court judge?

First, I want to make a difference. I recognize the impact judges can have in the lives of those they encounter, from jurors, litigants, victims, and courtroom personnel. Second, I want to ensure and maintain the integrity of our legal system. Most of the lawyers I've had the honor to work with are the opposite of the characters featured in lawyer jokes. There is no perfect legal system, but I want to be part of the judiciary in the best system humans have created. Third, I enjoy the work. I love the law, and find satisfaction in researching, writing, and exploring a unique or complicated legal issue.

Having practiced law in almost all courts in this state, I'm aware that being a judge is challenging. Judges must thoughtfully, carefully, and efficiently decide difficult issues. Judges must work well with various people such as courtroom personnel, clerks, attorneys, and *pro se* litigants. Judges spend weeks, or even months, away from home to hold court in other counties. Nevertheless, my reasons for wanting to be a circuit court judge outweigh these challenges.

My legal experience is broad, deep, and varied making me well suited to the bench. I can make difficult decisions, even when it may be unpopular. Having had multiples hearings in different counties on the same day, I will continue to appreciate the daily pressures attorneys face in practicing law. If fortunate enough to be elected, it will be an honor to serve the state, and I will be a worthy and worthwhile public servant.

2. Do you plan to serve your full term if elected?

Yes.

3. Do you have any plans to return to private practice one day?

If I were elected, I would likely not return to private practice.

4. Have you met the Constitutional requirements for this position regarding age, residence, and years of practice?

Yes.

5. What is your philosophy regarding *ex parte* communications? Are there circumstances under which you could envision *ex parte* communications being tolerated?

Improper communication with the court erodes the fairness and trust in the judiciary. *Ex parte* communication is improper except when the law expressly permits such contact. For example, the law allows *ex parte* proceedings to determine if investigative, expert, and other services are reasonable and necessary for the representation of an indigent defendant. S.C. Code Ann. § 17-3-50(B) (2007). As such, I would only engage in *ex parte* communication in the limited circumstances authorized by law. I would also ensure my team knows the law regarding *ex parte* communication, so that phone calls and correspondence are properly handled.

6. If you disclosed something that had the appearance of bias, but you believed it would not actually prejudice your impartiality, what deference would you give a party that requested your recusal? Would you grant such a motion?

A judge must uphold the integrity of the judicial system, which requires understanding that the appearance of bias and actual bias are often one in the same. Each situation presents different facts and circumstances, so I would listen to the party requesting my recusal. Even if I believed I could rule fairly, I would nevertheless give careful consideration and deference to the request to avoid the appearance of impropriety.

7. How would you handle the appearance of impropriety because of the financial or social involvement of your spouse or a close relative?

I consider the financial or social involvement of my spouse, children, parent, and any other family member residing in my household to be akin to my own, and would follow the requirements of Canon 3E and 3F. If am aware of another close relative's involvement, I would disclose that and consider disqualifying myself, keeping in mind the obligation to uphold the integrity and independence of the judiciary, including avoiding the appearance of impropriety.

8. What standards would you set for yourself regarding the acceptance of gifts or social hospitality?

I would not accept gifts from lawyers that appear in front of me. However, an exception may be appropriate for nominal tokens, such as sweet treats when celebrating holidays or special events with others at the courthouse. Social hospitality is often offered with no intention of influence. However, the South Carolina Bar is small, and I would constantly be mindful of any social hospitality which might create even the appearance of bias or impropriety.

9. How would you handle a situation in which you became aware of misconduct or appearance of infirmity of a lawyer or of a fellow judge?

I would follow the rules regarding such situations and seek guidance from experienced judges. If I merely suspected misconduct, but lacked actual knowledge, I would consider speaking directly with the lawyer or judge about my concern. The specific facts would determine the appropriate action. For example, it may be appropriate to direct the lawyer to helpful resources offered through the South Carolina Bar.

10. Are you a member of any organization or association that, by policy or practice, prohibits or limits its membership on the basis of race, sex, religion, or national origin? If so, please identify the entity and explain if this organization practices invidious discrimination on any basis.

No.

11. Have you engaged in any fund-raising activities with any political, social, community, or religious organizations? Please describe.

I have attended fundraising events in my capacity as a board member for various non-profit organizations, and as a supporter of HospiceCare of the Piedmont. I previously served on a capital campaign committee for my church.

12. Do you have any business activities that you would envision remaining involved with if elected to the bench?

My husband is the sole shareholder and President of VANSCO, Inc. which makes wiring harnesses for customers in various industries. I am listed as an officer of the corporation, but I play no active role in the company's operations. Based on reading the Judicial Canons and reviewing judicial advisory opinions, it is unlikely that being an officer of this single

shareholder corporation would violate the judicial canons, such as Canon 4A or 4D which address extra-judicial and financial activities. Moreover, Canon 3E requires that I make reasonable efforts to be informed of the personal economic interests of my spouse and family living in my home. Since this corporation is owned by my husband, any event triggering disqualification would apply regardless of my role as an officer.

13. If elected, how would you handle the drafting of orders?

I would draft as many of my own orders as possible, but the reality of available judicial resources and caseloads likely means that attorneys will draft proposed orders on some cases. In reviewing a proposed order, I will ensure that all attorneys receive the proposed order and allow time for the other side to respond. I would sign the order after ensuring it accurately reflects the ruling.

14. If elected, what methods would you use to ensure that you and your staff meet deadlines?

Currently, I maintain calendar and case management systems that ensure deadlines are met. If elected, I would implement a similar system. I would also actively manage team members to ensure the system is operating as intended. I would likely assign a dedicated team member to draft regular reports required by the judicial department, so there is consistency in timely completing those reports.

15. What is your philosophy on "judicial activism," and what effect should judges have in setting or promoting public policy?

A circuit court judge is tasked with applying the law, not creating it. The judge should decide the specific case or controversy in front of her. For our judicial system to be fair, predictable, and efficient, a trial court judge must follow precedent, statutes, and court rules.

16. Canon 4 allows a judge to engage in activities to improve the law, legal system, and administration of justice. If elected, what activities do you plan to undertake to further this improvement of the legal system?

Throughout my legal career, I've enthusiastically educated others about the law and judicial system. While I appreciate lawyers who regularly teach continuing legal education courses, I've dedicated time to teaching and mentoring young people, particularly students and young lawyers. I've served as the volunteer mock trial coach for Greenwood High School since 2013. I keep in touch with many of my former students, and enjoy following

their successes, including several who are currently in law school. I taught classes as an adjunct professor at Lander University. Numerous college students have completed internships at my office. The South Carolina Bar recognized my work as a mentor when I received the G. Dewey Oxner, Jr. Mentor of the Year Award in 2019.

A Circuit Court judge is uniquely positioned to mentor her clerk, a new young lawyer. My mentoring experience makes me particularly well suited for this part of the job. My enthusiasm for sharing knowledge and engaging in activities to improve the law, legal system, and administration of justice would continue as a member of the judiciary.

17. Do you feel that the pressure of serving as a judge would strain personal relationships (i.e. spouse, children, friends, or relatives)? How would you address this?

Throughout my legal career, my husband, children, and family have continuously supported and encouraged me. That would not change if I became a judge. However, there is no doubt that serving as a judge could strain personal relationships given the nature of the job. I would seek guidance and advice from other judges with similar experiences.

18. The following list contains five categories of offenders that would perhaps regularly appear in your court. Discuss your philosophy on sentencing for these classes of offenders.

I will provide my general thoughts and overall philosophies. However, as a judicial candidate, the only pledge or promise I can make is that I will perform my duties faithfully and impartially. Further, I cannot make statements that commit or appear to commit myself with respect to cases, controversies, or issues that are likely to come before the court.

In all sentencing decisions, I will consider the statutory sentencing ranges, including any mandatory minimum, severity of the crime, impact on the victim, the State's recommendation (if any), defendant's background and criminal history, prior incarcerations, and any mitigating factors.

- a. Repeat offenders:

Repeat offenders are familiar with and have already been through the judicial system. They know the consequences of failing to conform their conduct to comply with the law. In sentencing repeat offenders, the Court must follow any enhanced or mandatory sentencing statutes that apply. While repeat offenders may be more deserving of a harsher sentence than a first-time offender, every case is unique, and each sentencing must consider more than the single factor of one's prior criminal history.

b. Juveniles (that have been waived to the Circuit Court):

If a juvenile is waived to General Sessions, the court is dealing with a serious offense. The juvenile's age, along with the other sentencing factors, would be considered. I would follow the law regarding any mandatory minimum sentences for a serious offense.

c. White collar criminals:

Some believe that white collar crimes are victimless, but that is rarely true. If one's illegal conduct has caused another to lose their life savings, such a loss is difficult, if not impossible, to recover. The same factors considered in all other cases should be considered when sentencing white collar crimes.

d. Defendants with a socially and/or economically disadvantaged background:

In sentencing, I would expect to hear about a person's background, which often addresses social and economic issues. Those factors should be considered along with all others during sentencing. No single factor should determine the sentence for any crime.

e. Elderly defendants or those with some infirmity:

In sentencing, I would expect to hear about a person's age and health. I would consider this factor, along with all the other factors, in crafting an appropriate sentence. However, no single factor is determinative, and I would consider all factors in sentencing.

19. Are you involved in any active investments from which you derive additional income that might impair your appearance of impartiality?

Most of my investments are in publicly traded companies or mutual funds. It is unlikely the value of the investments would impair my appearance of impartiality. If any such investment may impair even the appearance of impartiality, I would disclose the information on the record even if I did not think there was a real basis for disqualification. If a certain investment might require frequent disqualification, I would divest myself as required by the Judicial Code of Conduct.

20. Would you hear a case where you or a member of your family held a *de minimis* financial interest in a party involved?

A *de minimis* financial interest is generally not grounds for

disqualification so long as my impartiality could not be questioned. However, if I or my family member held a *de minimis* financial interest in a party involved, I would disclose the facts on the record, reassure the parties of my impartiality, and provide counsel time to discuss the matter with their client. I would move forward if the parties consented on the record.

21. Have you met the mandatory minimum hours requirement for continuing legal education courses for the past reporting period?

Yes.

22. What do you feel is the appropriate demeanor for a judge and when do these rules apply?

Always and in all places, a judge must be respectful, patient, courteous, fair, and thoughtful. A judge must always maintain a calm and neutral demeanor while maintaining firm control of the courtroom. A judge must always be, and appear to be, impartial. A judge must respect everyone, listen carefully, and keep an open mind.

23. Do you feel that it is ever appropriate to be angry with a member of the public, especially with a criminal defendant? Is anger ever appropriate in dealing with attorneys or pro se litigants?

All of us have been angry at times in our lives. However, it is important that a judge not show anger or take it out on anyone in the courtroom. Being firm may be necessary, but that is different from showing anger. A judge must be able to maintain a calm, fair, and patient demeanor and maintain decorum in the courtroom.

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THE ANSWERS TO THE ABOVE QUESTIONS ARE TRUE AND COMPLETE TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE.

Sworn to before me this ____ day of _____, 2024.

(Signature)

(Print Name)
Notary Public for South Carolina
My Commission Expires: _____