

SIXTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT 13

QUESTION 1: CANDIDATE THERESA NEO:

Please provide a brief description of the judicial office you are seeking, including a brief description of the duties of the office.

District Court Judge for the Sixth Judicial District in Duluth, Minnesota.

QUESTION 2: CANDIDATE THERESA NEO:

Please provide a personal statement describing your past work and life experience and why you are seeking this office.

As an assistant city attorney in Duluth, I worked as a prosecutor and as a community liaison with law enforcement to reduce blight and nuisance crimes. I created a program for first time offenders with low level crimes to have a charge dismissed if they completed a community service project. I was recognized for this work at the city with the "Own It, Solve It, Take Pride" award. As a staff attorney at Safe Haven Shelter for Battered Women, I represented victims of domestic assault, sexual harassment and stalking in civil and family cases. As a staff attorney at Indian Legal Assistance Program I provide legal representation to people charged with crimes and representation to parties in civil cases such as divorces, custody disputes and eviction cases.

QUESTION 3: CANDIDATE THERESA NEO:

What do you believe is the mission and role of a judge in the community?

I strive to instill in the community confidence in our judicial system, by treating all fairly and with open ears. We can do this by working hard to handle cases efficiently, treating all those who come before us respectfully as demonstrated by our demeanor and understanding of their case and giving them an opportunity to be heard.

QUESTION 4:

CANDIDATE THERESA NEO:

It is important for candidates to engage, reach out, and listen to all communities, especially underrepresented communities. How are you currently accomplishing this and what is your plan to continue if elected?

Judges are required to be neutral and treat all people who enter the court room fairly. For this reason judges involvement in partisan or “specific issue” organizations is restricted. I participate and volunteer in activities that serve our community as a whole. One example is my support of the Volunteer Attorney Program (VAP) which provides legal representation to people with civil cases that cannot afford an attorney. I have volunteered in the soup kitchens in our community and participated in Neighbor National Night Out activities.

QUESTION 5:

CANDIDATE THERESA NEO:

Do you believe the composition of juries adequately and fairly reflects society at large? Why or why not? If not, what can we do to change this?

Jury pool selection is not within the judges control. In the courtroom, attorneys determine whether a juror is a good fit for the subject matter of a case. If the jury pool is not reflective of the community then the method of how jurors are selected for jury duty would need to be addressed.

QUESTION 6: CANDIDATE THERESA NEO:

Do you believe there is under-representation of women or people of color in the court system? If so, how would you work to correct the problem?

In some areas of the court system there is a lack of diversity. As an individual I look for mentoring opportunities and encourage women and people of color to apply for jobs. It is important that notice of job opportunities is adequately disseminated to reach these groups.

QUESTION 7. CANDIDATE THERESA NEO:

What do you believe are the causes of the high rates of minority incarceration?

This is a complex issue that has been has been researched and continues to be studied. As a judge I do my best to be aware of my own implicit biases and to be vigilant about looking for biases in the system.

QUESTION 8: CANDIDATE THERESA NEO:

Do you believe that all citizens have adequate access to legal help and the legal system? If not, what can be done to provide wider and better access?

The legal system can be very complicated and overwhelming. We are fortunate that in our region there is a staffed law library that is open to the public. We have very experienced public defenders and well supported organizations assisting people with civil cases such as divorces, parenting and custody issues and eviction cases.

QUESTION 9:

CANDIDATE THERESA NEO:

What have been the most effective methods for improving court procedures and efficiency? What other methods would you suggest?

Technology. The ability to store, share, file and retrieve information across the district increases the speed at which we can schedule and hear cases.

QUESTION 10:

CANDIDATE THERESA NEO:

What do you perceive as the greatest obstacles to justice, if any?

Not enough funding for public defenders and funding for organizations that provide legal representation for people who cannot afford an attorney in civil matters. Another issue is the extremely high debt load (student loan) for new attorneys makes it difficult to lure them to public service. There are some programs to reduce student loans for attorneys who work in these areas however the programs are not available for everyone.

QUESTION 11:

CANDIDATE THERESA NEO:

What are the most critical issues facing the criminal justice system in the region?

Addiction and mental health issues that result in criminal behavior.