

Villar the right choice for chief prosecutor

Mike Villar is my candidate of choice. I support Mike Villar because he is not part of the political swamp that runs Allegan County. He is not someone who feels entitled to the position. He knows that his willingness to stand up to Margaret Bakker and the Allegan Swamp might cost him in his day-to-day legal practice.

Villar is well respected by his colleagues and is an active citizen in both his faith and in the city and county of Allegan. He is willing to stand up for all residents of Allegan County in order to fight for what is right. And, YES, Mr. Villar is very much a Republican.

Myrene Koch, on the other hand, is the hand-picked apprentice and would-be-successor of Circuit Judge Margaret Zuzich Bakker. Unlike other counties, there was zero transparency and openness regarding Ms. Koch's appointment. Other counties, in an attempt to demonstrate integrity and openness, receive applications from inside and outside their counties. Some counties even appoint a team of people to sit on a committee to recommend which person should be elevated to the position of chief prosecuting attorney. No, Ms. Koch's appointment was Margaret Bakker as acting as Queen Maker to groom her successor.

Ironically, Myrene Koch applied for the Berrien County prosecutor's position in 2013 and would have left Allegan County

MY TAKE



KEVIN TRAVIS

had she obtained the position. Unlike in Allegan, the Berrien County judges accepted applications from within and outside Berrien County. Ms. Koch's commitment to Allegan County can seem suspicious considering that she was a long-term resident of South Haven, that her children attended Van Buren Schools until last year, and she was willing to leave Allegan County to become the chief prosecutor in Berrien.

Koch even has the brazenness to advertise she was selected by her friend Margaret Bakker on her campaign literature, thus bragging about the entanglement of the partisan executive brand of government and the non-partisan judiciary. The danger of entanglement goes to the very heart of why sitting judges are forbidden from endorsing political candidates. For the record, Mr. Villar has been ENDORSED by RETIRED Allegan judges Beach and Corsiglia.

This is not the first time that Margaret Bakker has arbitrarily appointed political patrons as part of her kingdom. She placed four of her judicial law clerks in highly paid jobs within the county, many

of them making decisions about Allegan County families, despite lacking lengthy legal experience and personal experience as parents. Another former law clerk was made an assistant prosecuting attorney — and the position was never posted for other applicants as in years past. One should question the entanglement of Bakker's office and that of the prosecutor. Even the new circuit court administrator was hand-picked by Ms. Bakker; curiously her job probationary period ends the day after the primary (things that make you go hmm).

Not only should Koch's commitment to Allegan County and inappropriate entanglement be questioned, but also her views on the constitutional rights of Allegan citizens. She told the first defense council in *People v. Anthony McFarlane* that she didn't care if the defendant was innocent, just whether there was enough evidence to convict him. McFarlane, a disabled veteran, was subsequently sent to prison on questionable scientific evidence regarding shaken baby syndrome; (a topic so questionable the University of Michigan was awarded a DOJ grant to defend wrongly convicted shaken baby defendants).

In *People v. Joseph Treacy*, Ms. Koch refused to drop the criminal sexual conduct case during trial even after the complaining witness committed perjury on the witness stand. When the defense attorney asked the witness why she

made up her testimony the complaining witness responded "I wanted Miss Myrene to win." Yet Ms. Koch proceeded to deliberation instead of doing the honorable thing and drop the charges. Was this witness coached? A prosecutor has an obligation NOT to prosecute those who are innocent and those where the case cannot be proved beyond a reasonable doubt.

In her short tenure as chief prosecutor, circuit court criminal cases are now crowding out all other docket items. The primary cause is due to overcharging by the prosecutor's office and not offering appropriate plea bargains. Why is this important? Overtime is paid to every sheriff, officer and law enforcement official who must testify and there are countless more preliminary examinations, pretrial hearings and trials. This strategy is wasting taxpayer dollars and did not occur under Fred Anderson. The circuit court even had a meeting this spring to address this very issue, but no one was allowed to blame Koch's tactics and Margaret Bakker defended Koch's methods.

Help stand up for the rights of citizens in Allegan County. Drain the Allegan Swamp and consider voting for Mike Villar on Aug. 7.

— *Kevin Travis is the Watson Township Supervisor and a former law clerk for Allegan County Circuit Court.*