

Governor Schwarzenegger's New Judge Picks Reflect Diversity

By Courtney Fielding

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After taking heat from lawmakers and bar associations claiming his appointments skewed too heavily toward white males, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger selected 14 new trial court judges on Thursday, and all but three are women or minorities.

In Los Angeles County, five of seven appointees come from African-American, Latino or Asian backgrounds. Two of the new judges are women - one Latino and one Caucasian.

"It does seem like a big improvement for diversity in Los Angeles, and I'm really glad to see it," said James Aguirre, former chair of the judicial evaluations committee for the Mexican American Bar Association of Los Angeles and a state bar board member. "I was disappointed with the governor's past appointments. I didn't think there was enough of a push for women and minority appointees."

Schwarzenegger has long battled the perception that he doesn't place a high enough priority on bench diversity. In 2006, then-Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez slashed funding for newly authorized judgeships, demanding Schwarzenegger show commitment to diversity, though the money was later restored.

The issue reached its apex in June 2007, when other Democratic lawmakers, representing the Asian Pacific Islander, black and Latino caucuses, urged legislative leaders to block funding for judgeships, citing what they called Schwarzenegger's "dismal" record of appointing minorities and women to the bench.

The next month, the governor appointed 18 new judges, including several women and minorities.

Aguirre said the priorities of the state and speciality bar associations are finally being reflected in Schwarzenegger's appointments.

"I would think that the bar clearly indicating a commitment to diversity has an effect on the governor," he said. "There has been a growing pattern of the governor making increasingly more diverse picks."

Much of the uptick has been credited to Sharon Majors-Lewis, the governor's latest judicial appointments secretary. Since taking the position in 2007, the governor's judicial appointees have been 36 percent female and 29 percent minorities. From 2003 to 2007, 32 percent of appointees were female and just 17 percent were minorities.

In Los Angeles, appointees were primarily Democrats. Just one Republican, Geanene Yriarte, was selected.

Yriarte, 39, has served as a deputy district attorney for the Los Angeles County district attorney's office since 1997. She earned a law degree from Loyola Law School.

Two of the governor's picks in the county are Superior Court commissioners. Victor H. Greenberg, 48, has held the position since 2000. Before that, the Hastings College of the Law graduate was the Children's Services inspector general for Los Angeles County and an attorney representing the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services.

Maren E. Nelson, 52, left Morrison & Foerster, where she was a partner, in 2004 for a spot on the Los Angeles County bench. She attended the USC Gould School of Law.

Other Los Angeles appointees include Huey P. Cotton, 52; David S. Cunningham III, 53; Howard L. Halm, 66; and Michael Terrell, 51.

Cotton is a shareholder at Cozen O'Connor. The Temple University Law School graduate worked as a senior trial attorney for the Defenders Association of Philadelphia from 1983 to 1988 and as a staff attorney for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in 1983.

Cunningham has served as a principal at Meyers, Nave, Riback Silver & Wilson since 2007 and as a partner at Kelly Lytton & Vann since 2005. He is a graduate of New York University School of Law.

Halm is an equity partner for Wilson, Elser, Moskowitz, Edelman & Dicker. Prior to that, he was a shareholder, partner and associate for Breidenbach, Buckley, Huchting, Halm & Hamblet from 1975 to 2000 and a deputy attorney general for the California Department of Justice from 1969 to 1975. He graduated from the University of San Diego School of Law.

Terrell has served as an assistant U.S. attorney since 1991. He earned a law degree from Stanford Law School.

Elsewhere in the state, San Diego County received two judges, Ronald F. Frazier and Tamila E. Ipema. They are both Democrats.

Frazier, 54, has been of counsel for Dietz, Gilmor & Associates since 2003 and a sole practitioner since 2000. From 1989 to 1998, the University of San Diego School of Law graduate served as a shareholder and director for Shifflet, Walters, Kane & Konoske.

Ipema, 52, of Oceanside, has worked as a commissioner for the San Diego County Superior Court since April 2008. Before that, she was a Los Angeles County Superior Court commissioner. Ipema was an assistant district counsel for the U.S. Department of Justice from 1995 to 1999. She earned a master of laws degree from Georgetown University and a law degree from the University of Louisville.

Other counties will get just one new judge this go-around. Bruce E. Chan has been appointed to the bench in San Francisco.

Chan, 52, a Democrat, has served as a commissioner for the San Francisco County Superior Court since 2004. Previously, the UC Davis School of Law graduate served as chief counsel for the California State Assembly Committee on Public Safety from 2000 to 2004. Chan worked for the San Francisco Public Defender's Office as a senior trial attorney from 1989 to 1999 and as a trial attorney from 1981 to 1986.

Donald J. Proietti, 54, a Democrat, will join the bench in Merced County. Proietti fills one of the new positions created by S.B. 56, which provided funding for 50 additional judgeships statewide. Proietti has been a partner for Allen Proietti & Fagalde since 1983. He graduated from the Thomas Jefferson School of Law.

Christopher Marshall, a 57-year-old Democrat, was appointed to the bench in San Bernardino County. Marshall has been an attorney with the San Bernardino County counsel's office since 2007. From 1993 to 2007, he was a shareholder at Bonne, Bridges, Mueller, O'Keefe & Nichols. He served as in-house counsel for Mullikin Medical Centers and Pioneer Hospital from 1986 to 1988. Marshall earned his law degree from Loyola Law School.

Thirty-eight-year-old Yuba City Republican Susan E. Green was appointed to a judgeship in Sutter County. She has worked for the Sutter County district attorney's office as a supervising deputy district attorney since 2007 and previously served as a deputy district attorney from 1995 to 2007. She graduated from the University of the Pacific, McGeorge School of Law.

Beth A.R. McGowen, 44, of Morgan Hill, will take the bench in Santa Clara County. A partner for Bingham McCutchen since 2002, she previously served as an associate and partner with McCutchen Doyle Brown & Enersen from 1990 to 2002. The Republican earned her degree from Hastings College of the Law.

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