



Karen
Wilkerson

Daily Chronicle questionnaire: Karen L.S. Wilkerson

Election primary: State's Attorney (Democrat)

Age: 44

Bio: Attended Northern Illinois University and received a bachelor's degree in performing arts (1988), a master's degree in education (1992) and a law degree, juris doctor (1997); worked with the Illinois Department of Corrections before receiving law degree; held an administrative position at Elgin Community College in Student Services; have been in private practice since 2003 in criminal and civil areas.

Why are you seeking the office of state's attorney?

Because it is time out for politics as usual. The role of the state's attorney is vitally important to the safeguarding of our community. The prosecution of crimes should be handled with honesty and integrity while always seeking truth and justice. As state's attorney, I plan to address issues related to community safety, crime control and financial responsibility. As our county continues to grow, so to will the issues of safety and crime. I will prosecute those individuals that violate the law. In light of an increasing population, a focus on financial responsibility is of utmost importance. It is necessary to maintain sound fiscal management but also seek alternative strategies and resources to support and improve the county's fiscal position. I possess the skills necessary to effectively and efficiently manage the state's attorney office.

What distinguishes you from the other candidates in this primary?

As a 26-year resident of DeKalb, I am vested in this community. I have watched the changing demographics of our county. DeKalb County is on the brink of growth and change, and it is imperative that these changes are embraced in order to continue moving the county forward. Prior to receiving my law degree, I worked in higher education and corrections. My experiences with managing multimillion dollar budgets will be applied to the state's attorney office in order to support the economic sovereignty of the county. Additionally, my experiences with training and managing employees will increase the effectiveness of the state's attorney office, thus saving the county vital fiscal resources.

If elected, what is your top priority?

First and foremost, my top priority is to serve and safeguard the citizens of DeKalb County. I will work closely with the local, county and state law enforcement agencies to address the growing gang problem in the county. As a former corrections officer in juvenile corrections, I am fully aware that gang members recruit children at the elementary school level. I will continue to work closely with school districts and other social service agencies in order to keep our children safe.

What, if any, changes need to be made to modernize the state's attorney office?

Information technology enhances the judicial process. The use of electronic file storage systems reduces the amount of paper that needs to be stored on site and would create more workable space. Cross-training of assistant state's attorneys would allow for a better utilization of the offices resources.

The county has drug court. Is there any other specialty court that should be established?

Many individuals that enter the criminal court system have underlying mental health issues. As these issues are never addressed in the court system, these individuals continue to re-offend. Over the past few decades, the country's prisons and jails have become its default mental health system. With the overcrowding that faces our county jail, incarceration is not a solution to mental illness. A mental health court needs to be established. Additionally, juvenile crime and violence are on the rise, and the traditional juvenile system often leaves behind victims dissatisfied with the process and citizens frustrated at the system. The

Juvenile Mediation Program that was established in conjunction with Northern Illinois University College of Law needs to be re-evaluated and re-established in order to address this growing problem of juvenile delinquency.