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Nieman, Taber square off in May primary for DA seat

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BY TAYLOR HEEDEN, News + Record Staff

Two candidates, both Democrats and veterans of Chatham's district attorney office, are vying for the top District 18 post, which includes Chatham and Orange counties.

There's no Republican candidate, so the winner in May's primary race between Jeff Nieman and Kayley Taber is set to become the county's district attorney, replacing Jim Woodall. Woodall announced in March he would retire when his term expires this year. He was appointed interim DA in 2005 and then elected to the office in 2006.

Jeff Nieman

Nieman is the senior assistant district attorney for District 18. He currently lives in Chapel Hill with his wife Stephanie and his children, Burke and Larkin.

Nieman said he filed to run for district attorney in Chatham and Orange counties to ensure the region continued to "utilize a progressive approach to criminal justice."

“The district attorney is sworn to seek justice, not necessarily convictions,” Nieman said. “Our next DA should not only bring sufficient experience but also a demonstrated track record of leveraging rehabilitative and alternative approaches to achieve better criminal justice outcomes for all.”

Nieman’s goals for the job include to “effectively decriminalize personal use marijuana in our district, expunge every juvenile criminal record eligible in our district under the Second Chance Act and set official policy eliminating the death penalty in the district.”

But the largest issue Nieman wants to address as DA is systemic racism. He said by addressing bias within the system, the district will be able to have an equitable way to justice.

“As DA, I will work to ensure that courts treat all people fairly regardless of their race, identity and socioeconomic status,” Nieman said.

Nieman said he would hire people from marginalized groups to ensure everyone is represented in his staff.

“I will make intentional recruiting efforts to encourage more applicants from underrepresented communities to consider future careers in a district attorney’s office, especially in our district,” he said. “I believe hiring decisions should be made with an appreciation of the community served.”

Nieman has worked as the assistant district attorney, which he said gives him more experience than Taber. As an attorney for over 16 years, Nieman said his career showcases his ability to perform well as District 18’s attorney.

“Chatham and Orange counties deserve a DA with years of experience in the criminal courts, deep roots in the community and a proven track record of utilizing a progressive approach to criminal justice,” he said. “I am running to bring those attributes to the community in which I have lived my entire life.”

Kayley Taber

Taber has served as managing assistant district attorney for District 18 since 2007. Prior to that, she served seven years as an assistant district attorney in the office.

Taber has been an active attorney for over 25 years and lives in Pittsboro. She said she wants to become the district attorney to serve as “an inspiration for young girls and boys so they understand that women can and should fill important leadership roles.”

“I believe that diverse voices and experiences lead to better outcomes for all who intersect with the criminal justice system,” Taber said. “I have a proven history of advocating for the mentally ill and addicted and working to protect the most vulnerable from harm. I reflect our community ideals of fairness, equity and compassion.”

Taber’s goals as DA range from increasing diversity among the district attorney staff to making the court process more accessible via remote technology such as Zoom or other methods.

She also wants to increase the amount of resources for domestic violence victims in Chatham County.

“Chatham County victim services, Second Bloom and other nonprofit community partners have been working diligently to establish a support network for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, but there is more to be done,” she said. “We must work together to support survivors of sexual violence so that they can have the ability to seek and receive justice in the courts.”

Taber said she provides the right experience and has the drive to be able to accomplish the goals she has set for the office. Her training in victim trauma and how it affects mental health gives her added perspective about what a district attorney needs to know to fulfill the duties of the job.

“I have specialized training and experience as a special victims prosecutor which gives me a deep knowledge and understanding of trauma and its effects on physical and mental health,” she said. “Voters should choose me so that they will be assured that they have a district attorney with the proven skills, compassion and leadership to make our justice system reflect our community ideals.”

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