

Diane Hathaway's victory over Chief Justice Taylor balances Michigan's scales of justice

By Brian McKeen

Diane Hathaway's recent upset victory over Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Clifford Taylor was welcome news to all Michigan citizens who believe in the importance of a fair and independent judiciary. In the aftermath of this great victory, however, we must stop and realize that we have taken but one small step in the right direction. A long and difficult road lies ahead in the battle to reclaim the integrity of the Michigan judiciary for the benefit of the people of the State of Michigan.

Since the Engler administration, there has been an all out assault waged against our civil justice system. Fueled by special interest groups including the insurance industry and the medical community, Engler's so called "Gang of Four" have wrought serious damage to the scales of justice leaving them dangerously imbalanced. The "Gang of Four" Engler appointees Clifford Taylor, Maura Corrigan, Robert Young, Jr. and Stephen Markman have by and large voted as a bloc and have carried out an aggressive and radical agenda which has benefitted the insurance industry at the expense of Michigan consumers.

Under the "Gang of Four's" reign of judicial tyranny, the rights of injured persons have been sacrificed. Meritorious cases have been thrown out of Court before citizens even had a chance to try their case in a Court of law before a jury of their peers. While victims of medical malpractice have perhaps felt the most painful stings of injustice, no consumer group has been spared. Individuals whose rights have been violated and who have been injured at the expense of reckless drivers, defective products, dangerous premises, even sexual assault and environmental polluters have had their cases thrown out of Court. The right to trial by jury is guaranteed by both the United States and Michigan Constitutions as a basic fundamental right and is a pillar of our American democracy. The radical pro-business agenda of the "Gang of Four" threatened the rights of our citizens and imperil our democracy.

Diane Hathaway's victory is an important initial step in the restoration of fairness in the Michigan Supreme Court. While the Republicans still enjoy a 4-3 majority in the Supreme Court, Justice Elizabeth Weaver, a Republican, has demonstrated a willingness to vote independently of the "Gang of Four" and has showed an inclination towards fairness, objectivity and independence. It is hoped that the newly constituted Supreme Court will help level the playing field and balance the scales of justice. Michigan citizens deserve a fair and independent judiciary.

Diane Hathaway's win is a clear victory for freedom and democracy. Justice Elect Hathaway's victory was the result of hard work by a coalition of Michigan residents whose eyes were opened to the threat posed by the "Gang of Four." As a result, Michigan citizens now have more equal footing in our judicial system. The mission, however, is incomplete. As long as individuals serve on the Supreme Court with an agenda to benefit special interests at the expense of individual consumers, our judiciary, and therefore our rights as citizens remain imperiled.

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