



Judging by ability rather than party loyalty: editorial

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By **The Plain Dealer Editorial Board**

The Cuyahoga County Common Pleas bench gets a new member today: Shaker Heights attorney Robert McClelland was **appointed** by Gov. John Kasich to replace Judge Eileen A. Gallagher, who was elected to the Ohio Court of Appeals last November.

McClelland is a top-shelf choice -- an experienced litigator who was **rated "excellent"** by the four bar associations that participate in "Judge4Yourself" when he ran unsuccessfully for a Common Pleas seat last year.

It's good to see McClelland's talent rewarded. But the way in which he got the appointment may be even more heartening.

As candidates for Gallagher's seat came forward, both the governor's staff and county GOP Chairman Rob Frost told them they needed to be vetted by a new judicial qualifications committee organized by Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association President Michael Ungar. Only candidates deemed qualified by the screening group, a diverse collection of attorneys from all corners of the local legal community as well as some non-lawyers, would be considered for the appointment. McClelland was among those who passed muster.

Outgoing Gov. Ted Strickland and Democratic Chairman Stuart Garson also used the newly organized group last December to fill a vacancy at the Cleveland Municipal Court. That post went to the very well-prepared **Lynn McLaughlin-Murray**.

Garson and Frost deserve a shout-out here. They've been involved with **Ungar's efforts** to raise the quality of the bench since last year. Both are lawyers and have indicated they'd like the qualifications committee -- not a partisan group focused on electability -- to be the first stop for judicial hopefuls. That is not necessarily popular with all of their constituents, but it is the right thing to do.

Better candidates will lift the quality of the bench.

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Common Pleas Judge
Robert McClelland

