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State Supreme Court Justice Candidates Fire Off At Negative Campaigning

Both Candidates Say They Signed Clean Campaign Pledge

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DODGEVILLE, Wis. -- The race for a seat on Wisconsin's Supreme Court heated up on Sunday in Iowa County as candidates spoke about negative campaigning.

Ads by third-party groups in the state have thrust the Supreme Court race into the public eye in the past few weeks.

Some of the ads have been deemed misleading or even false by a national fact-checking organization.

On Sunday, both candidates agreed that the third-party campaigning is detrimental to the races they are running.

"I believe the candidates in a race as well as citizens of this great state may be best served by these third-party interest groups taking their interest elsewhere," said Burnett County Circuit Court Judge Michael Gableman.

Gableman is challenging incumbent justice Louis Butler for the seat.

"I think you have every right to hear from Judge Gableman, every right to hear from me, and while the other groups have constitutional rights to express their point of view, I don't think they should do it in an untruthful and wrong way."

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The debate was held inside the Iowa County courthouse. Candidates answered questions submitted from audience members from topics ranging from the constitution as a living document to the partisanship of the race.

Candidates also took shots at each other.

Gableman pointed out what he believes is a record of Butler legislating from the bench.

And Butler said Gableman hadn't repudiated any of the third-party ads Butler said were run to Gableman's presumed advantage.

"It's easy to cast these things out in 30-second sound bites but we write 83-page opinions and you cant put that down in 30 seconds," said Butler. "When I hear the type of campaigning that's going on and see the type of ads that disrespect victims and disrespect family members and children, we should not put up with that which is beneath the dignity of the office that I hold."

"I think also as a judicial conservative who believes in giving a fair application to the plain language of the law, I will not legislate from the bench," said Gableman. "That's not what the good people of this great state expect from their justices and that's not what they're going to find from justice Gableman."

Both candidates claim to have signed a clean campaign pledge, although each differs on whether the other has signed the correct pledge.

Election for the state Supreme Court office is April 1.

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