

DA Dan Dow deserves a second term; 'Judge' Cummins is not a serious contender

By Andrea Seastrand

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Being district attorney is a serious job and one of the most important in our criminal justice system.

Even someone who has only watched the legal system through the lens of media coverage of a famous case like the O.J. Simpson trial understands the critical decisions a DA must make. It's not just enough for the police to solve a crime, it's the job of a prosecutor to get a conviction from a jury of peers and put the criminal behind bars.

This is no easy task, which is why this year's race for San Luis Obispo County DA is such an important one.

Dan Dow has done a fine job as our DA since assuming the office three years ago, but he is now [facing a challenge](#) from a candidate best known locally for defending Rhonda Wisto (one of the defendants in the 2011 murder of Santa Maria teenager Dystiny Myers) during her trial that ultimately led to her conviction.

Mike Cummins, a former judge and defense attorney, has announced he is entering the race to challenge Dow. This is Cummins' second run for a DA job. He was already [defeated](#) once in a bid for Stanislaus County District Attorney back in 2006. He is hoping that perhaps the second time will be the charm.

While Cummins has done just about every job in the legal system from deputy DA to judge to defense attorney, his qualifications for the job are questionable at best. He has diverse experience, but he has never been in a leadership position as demanding as running a DA's office. For the county's top prosecutor, effective leadership is the difference between failure and success.

There is nothing on Cummins' resume that suggests he's up for that part of the job. Because he had let his [law license go inactive](#), he was not even allowed to practice law in California until just recently.

All these are troubling signs for someone seeking an office of great importance. We need serious candidates for DA. Cummins is not one of them.

Cummins relies most on his experience as a judge when touting his qualifications. In fact, he legally changed his name to "Judge Mike" because state laws would not allow him to list retired judge as a ballot title when he considered

a run for state insurance commissioner last year. The law allows for only listing a person's most recent job, which for Cummins was as a defense attorney. To get an edge with voters by promoting his time as a judge, he legally changed his name. This type of cheap gimmick to bend the law for political advantage has no place in the job of top prosecutor.

Cummins' legal career gained notoriety when he defended Nipomo resident Rhonda Wisto in the Myers case. To date, this is the most significant case he has ever been involved in. Given the public safety challenges that exist today, we need leaders who are committed to protecting victims and are tough on crime. This in an era of [rising crime rates](#) across California due to bad policies coming out of Sacramento that have led to more dangerous criminals being released into our communities. While violent crime in San Luis Obispo [dropped slightly](#) from 2015 to 2016, property crime spiked in the county's largest city, according to the FBI's latest crime statistics in its annual national Uniform Crime Reporting database that includes data on each of the county's seven cities.

Local leaders need to push back against the direction state officials are taking us, and that's exactly what Dow has done.

Cummins has opened his campaign with critical comments about District Attorney Dow's leadership of the office and has second-guessed many of his decisions. He believes the DA's office is over-pursuing cases it cannot win. That is absolutely the wrong mentality. We need a prosecutor who is aggressive in defending justice, especially at a time when the state is neglecting to fight back against rising crime.

"Judge Mike" might bring a few gimmicks to the race for DA, but he is far from qualified for the job of top prosecutor.

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