

Judge rapped for pulling endorsement

Written by BILL SCHANEN IV
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Voiland criticized by judicial candidate who says he knew she signed recall petition before backing her

A spokesman for a Milwaukee judicial candidate said this week that Ozaukee County Judge Joseph Voiland, who unseated a longtime incumbent last year after attacking him for signing the Gov. Scott Walker recall petition, volunteered his support of Laura Gramling Perez despite the fact she told him she signed the same recall petition.

That's why Gramling Perez, a Milwaukee County court commissioner who is running for the county's Branch 32 Circuit Court seat, was surprised last week when Voiland withdrew his endorsement and issued a statement to the media that criticized her decision and perpetuated baseless questions about whether she listed a false address on the recall petition, campaign adviser Sachin Chheda said.



Joseph Voiland

"Ms. Gramling Perez made a mistake in signing the recall petition; I too made a mistake in endorsing her with full knowledge, including recent reports that a false address was being listed alongside a version of her name on the petition," Voiland wrote.

"I can only control my mistake, and have withdrawn my endorsement, effective immediately."

He declined to answer questions about his endorsement of Gramling Perez and his decision to withdraw his support.

Voiland's statement did not sit well with Gramling Perez.

"There's a sense of frustration when you're honest with folks and they twist what really happened, then don't even have the courtesy to pick up the phone or talk to the media about the real story," Chheda said.

In his statement, Voiland refers to a report that stemmed from a Wisconsin Election Watch online posting that suggested Gramling Perez may have listed a false address on the recall petition.

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Gramling Perez has never denied signing the recall petition and did not list a false address, Chheda said.

“It’s really inappropriate for someone who is a judge to be so cavalier with the context so as to suggest some sort of impropriety on the part of Laura,” he said.

According to Chheda, Voiland approached Gramling Perez, a former coworker at the Milwaukee law firm Reinhart Boerner Van Deuren, late last year and volunteered his support.

Well aware of the fact that Voiland criticized Ozaukee County Circuit Judge Tom Wolfgram for signing the recall petition in his successful campaign to unseat him, Gramling Perez wanted to be clear on the issue, Chheda said. “She went out of her way to tell him (Voiland) months ago that she signed the recall petition before she ever added his name to any list of her supporters,” he said.

All was fine until Gramling Perez mentioned Voiland’s name at a Republican event in Cudahy last week.

When asked during the Milwaukee South Branch Caucus if she signed the recall petition, Gramling Perez said she had and explained why, citing Voiland’s support.

“I can tell you one of the people who endorsed me is Joe Voiland, who was recently elected to the bench in Ozaukee County,” she told those in attendance, according to a video posted by Wisconsin Election Watch.

“Some of you who are familiar with Joe know ... that a significant issue in his race was that the incumbent, Tom Wolfgram, signed the petition. I spoke with Joe. I’ve known him for a long time. I discussed with Joe that I signed the recall petition and explained why.

“He knows me. He knows I’m a fair and independent attorney, and that I’ll be a fair and independent judge.”

During his campaign last year, Voiland said Wolfgram compromised his impartiality when he signed the recall petition.

“I firmly believe in the separation of powers between the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government,” Voiland said in January 2013. “Judge Wolfgram crossed that line when he signed the recall petition.”

Gramling Perez’s comments at last week’s Republican meeting and her mention of Voiland quickly became fodder for Milwaukee talk radio, and Voiland pulled his support.

“Laura has been nothing but honest about signing the recall petition,” Chheda said. “For him (Voiland) not to admit he knew long before this that she signed the petition is not fair, to say the least.”

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