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**OPINION // EDITORIALS**

# Editorial: We recommend the following judges in four runoff races for July 14

By **The Editorial Board**

June 28, 2020





Early voting in the July 14 primary runoff elections begins Monday. Here, the early voting crew at Harris County County Attorney Conference Center location were setting up last October in advance of last year's November election.

Yi-Chin Lee, Houston Chronicle / Staff Photographer

## Adams in GOP Primary for 1st Court of



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We again recommend Terry Adams, 60, for his 30 years of a meaningful appellate law practice and solid reputation in the community for being an even-handed, accomplished attorney. He has been a primary lawyer on more than 200 appellate cases, including cases at every level including the U. S. Supreme Court. Adams was a briefing attorney for the Texas Supreme Court and is a member of the State Bar Court Rules Committee. He was editor-in-chief of the law review at South Texas College of Law and is now on the law school's advisory board. He is running against James Lombardino, a former district court family judge who has fared poorly in

Houston Bar Association's judicial evaluation polls. In 2017, 39.1 percent of respondents rated his overall performance as "needs improvement" and 48.8 percent said he needed to work on his impartiality.

## Thomas in Dem primary for 14th Court of Appeals, Place 7

We recommend Cheri Thomas, 40, who has a solid reputation among other lawyers and who has served as a staff attorney for this court of appeals. She was endorsed by three of her primary opponents. She is an honors graduate of University of Texas School of Law and a former clerk for the Honorable U.S. District Judge Jorge Solis. She then went into civil litigation at Baker Botts, the international law firm founded in Houston. From there she had a civil practice at the Stuart law firm, where she became a partner. Since 2017, she has handled roughly 50 civil and criminal appeals as a staff attorney for the 14th Court of Appeals. Her opponent, Tamika "Tami" Craft has been in court far more often handling her own cases than has Thomas, and her work as an appellate attorney at the Texas Workforce Commission is relevant. But Thomas' close familiarity with the court on which she serves tips our recommendation her way.

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## **Bell in Dem primary for the 339th District Court**

We again recommend Te'iva Bell, 40, who has served in the felony courts from three perspectives — as a prosecutor, a criminal defense attorney and a public defender. Her reputation in trial is superb though not all her opponents have liked going up against her, which can be a good thing. Bell has practiced for 15 years, handling thousands of cases and trying more than 50. She says she wants to reform the Harris County criminal justice system “in a manner to ensures ‘justice matters’ for all.” She says justice should not depend on wealth, judges should not control the appointment process and bond conditions should be about community safety. Bell faces opponent Candace White, who has been a Houston municipal court judge.

## **Thornton i n Dem primary for the 164th District Court**

We recommend Cheryl Elliott Thornton, 62, over the incumbent Alexandra Smoots-Thomas, who has been suspended and is under indictment.

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Thornton knows the legal landscape in Harris County well, as she has been senior assistant county attorney since 2011. She has also served Texas as an assistant attorney general and an administrative law judge. Thornton has been general counsel for Texas Southern University, where she graduated from the Thurgood Marshall School of Law. She has served as chair of the Houston police citizen advisory board. Thornton has run unsuccessfully for justice of the peace and county court-at-law judge in the past.

Even without this strong record of achievement, it would be hard for us to recommend her opponent. Smoots-Thomas was on this bench for 12 years and was suspended without pay by the Texas Commission on Judicial Conduct after she was indicted by a federal grand jury in November 2019 and charged with seven counts

of wire fraud. She is accused of misusing \$24,892 in campaign funds for personal expenses. She claims the federal prosecution is political and has pleaded not guilty.

In the last Houston Bar Association poll, 46.9 percent of respondents said Smoot-Thomas needed improvement.

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