

Yolo County district attorney candidates clash during League forum

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The Woodland and Davis League of Women Voters held a forum allowing incumbent Jeff Reisig and challenger Cynthia Rodriguez to square off in the race for Yolo County district attorney.

The debate, which was held at the Woodland Community and Senior Center — located at 2001 East St. — on Wednesday night, saw Reisig and Rodriguez fielding questions prepared by the League, audience members and previously electronically submitted questions from the public.

Reisig was first elected as district attorney in 2006 and has since won three consecutive elections. Before that, he served as a deputy and assistant chief district attorney in Yolo County for about 10 years. Reisig also currently serves as the president of the California District Attorneys Association.

Rodriguez is a longtime Yolo County resident and has 40 years of criminal legal experience. She has worked as a public defender and has held positions in multiple state agencies including the Department of Corrections and CalPERS. She currently works in private practice in Winters.

During opening statements, Reisig took the floor first, relying on his long tenure in office and citing his experience in prosecuting all kinds of cases as the reason he is most qualified for the position.



Incumbent Jeff Reisig speaks during the League of Women Voters forum on Wednesday, April 27. (Robyn Dobson / Daily Democrat)

“I’ve handled it all, personally, and I’ve supervised it all for 25 years,” Reisig said. “Not all lawyers are the same. You simply cannot be a competent district attorney without the experience that I have and unfortunately, my opponent does not have any experience as a criminal prosecutor. When I look at her record, I see no evidence that she has ever prosecuted a single case in her life as a criminal prosecutor. For that reason, there is only one person who’s qualified for this job.”

Rodriguez used her opening statement time to urge people to participate in the election and shared her vision for Yolo County if she were to be elected.

“If we were going to take the thing that we say is most important in democracy, their freedom, away from people, then we should be doing it in the right way,” Rodriguez said. “We should be doing it with facts, not imaginings and doing it with proof, not tricks. The reason I am here today is that I envision a Yolo County that has a community office where the district attorney is in Yolo every day. Where the district attorney is concerned about what people need, want and have.”

The candidates answered questions that touched upon a multitude of topics including mental health and criminality, recidivism, issues within the criminal justice system, homelessness, cash bail, the school to prison pipeline and relationships with law enforcement.

Asked what they believed were the two biggest issues facing the Yolo County criminal justice system, the candidates emphasized two different topics. Rodriguez focused on public safety and mental health, calling for more and bigger diversion and mental health programs.

Reisig chose to speak on the increase of violent crime throughout California and homelessness, which he called a “humanitarian crisis.” Reisig spoke on his five-point plan to reduce homelessness that he drafted several years ago which includes expanding conservatorship laws and establishing permanent drug and mental health courts. The full plan is available to be viewed on the Yolo County DA website.

“I’m glad my opponent is willing to admit that crime has gotten worse under his leadership and has not addressed the problems of our county,” Rodriguez argued. “What he’s going to do is what he should have already done. If he was going to make it better, that time has passed.”

Reisig refuted her statement by pointing out that the rise in violent crime is a statewide problem, not just a Yolo County issue.

“Some other places have done things to the law that my challenger supports which have caused this massive wave of crime across California,” Reisig emphasized. “I’ve been fighting hard and if you look at crime stats against any other county, you’re going to see that we do very well.”

Reisig spoke extensively about the programs he has helped put in place and overseen during his time in office including the Restorative Justice Partnership, mental health court, his partnership with Measures for Justice to launch Commons, a criminal justice transparency data portal and his recent 2021 partnership with the Stanford Computational Policy Lab to implement a “race-blind” charging program.

“Yolo County is viewed as a national leader on reform,” he said. “Our programs have helped thousands of people. The data tells the truth.”



Cynthia Rodriguez will be challenging incumbent Jeff Reisig for Yolo County district attorney in the June 7 primary election. (Robyn Dobson / Daily Democrat)

Rodriguez questioned Reisig's tactics, arguing his office was unattainable to the public and that he was using money to give lectures to other district attorneys instead of allocating resources toward expanding programs to allow more people to get treatment and reduce recidivism. If elected, she promised an "open-door" policy and laid out her plans to hire a diverse staff in order to appeal to those of all backgrounds.

"We need more diversion, more involvement with the community and more opportunities for people to understand why their DA is running around the state, going around the country touting his methods when we have problems right here in Yolo County that are not even being addressed," Rodriguez said. "We have people who are trying to meet him that are not allowed to."

Both candidates ended the forum with closing remarks, asking the public for their vote with Rodriguez emphasizing the need for change and Reisig reminding all of his experience and past successes.

The statewide primary election is set to take place on June 7.

The entire forum is available to be viewed on the Woodland League of Women Voters website at <https://my.lwv.org/california/woodland>.