

Budelmann brings experience to DA's office

Local defense attorney Jon Strods is challenging incumbent Jon Budelmann for the position of Cayuga County district attorney.

Strods, running on the Democratic line, is certainly passionate in his view that Budelmann is overly difficult to work with in making reasonable compromises when it comes to plea arrangements. He claims that the county's spending on assigned counsel is out of control because of unnecessary delays created by the DA's office.

Budelmann, running on the Republican, Conservative and Independence line, counters that public defenders are paid at an hourly rate and thus have far more incentive to drag cases out than prosecutors do.

Strods calls Budelmann's handling of the Cayuga Indian Nation cigarette taxation case "reckless" because Budelmann refused to bend after having been offered an out that would have spared the county some of its monetary liability in the case.

Budelmann correctly says that pressing forward actually saved the county money because tax-collecting retailers funneled hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of cigarette taxes to the county during the months that the Cayuga's Lake Side Trading store in Union Springs was put out of the tobacco business, and he said the case, which was ultimately decided in a 4-3 vote by the state's highest court, pushed New York state to make regulatory changes that have resulted in a more level playing field.

The point Strods chose to push during his campaign that we find most curious is an insistence that Budelmann more often than not pushes for maximum penalties, that he pursues felonies when misdemeanors would be more appropriate.

We agree that justice and fairness would not be served if every person who committed a crime were to be given the maximum allowable punishment. That's why prosecutors are allowed to use their discretion when deciding which charges to pursue and judges are given options when it comes time for sentencing.

And while Strods doesn't come across as "soft" on crime, he has separated himself too far from Budelmann on the issue of being "tough" on crime. And there's no denying that the DA's office has dealt with an increase in felony cases and has prosecuted them vigorously.

As for Budelmann's record, he does come across as stern and sometimes unwilling to bend — and that's fine at the right place and time.

We were a little put off by his insistence that he should get a raise.

It's true that it has been a number of years since that office has had a pay raise but it is one of the highest paid positions in county government, and "public service" should never be seen as a means of getting wealthy.

We believe he was correct to push the case against the Cayugas as far as he did, and we feel that overall he and the team he has assembled has been doing a pretty good job.

Budermann is not perfect. He's made mistakes, but on the whole he's been an effective prosecutor.

In the end, a big separator is experience. Budermann has nearly two decades working as a prosecutor, while Strods has relatively little (especially when compared with some other defense attorneys in this county) working criminal cases on the defense side.

When we compare the two choices, we don't see anything to make us believe the county needs to have somebody else take over the district attorney's office at this time.