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Marcus Ambrose For Circuit Court Judge

BY JAMES HURKE

A lot of judicial candidates say they want to rewrite the book Marcus Ambrose has done it.

Ambrose, a candidate for Dade Circuit Court Judge, has taken it upon himself to literally rewrite the book on the Dade County circuit court system — in less than 40 pages. With his landmark "Blueprint for Justice", Ambrose has laid the groundwork for sweeping, yet workable change in a court system that so desperately needs it. With his "Blueprint," Ambrose pledges to pick up where "Court Broom" left off.

The System: Ineffective, Abusive, Chaotic

"The system is so ineffective, so chaotic, so abusive that an attorney can't take a case for less than \$50,000 into the circuit court and have anything meaningful left for the client at the other end," Ambrose said.

A huge investment of both time and money is required to try a case in today's circuit court. This has made it impractical, if not impossible, for an attorney to accept a case that won't result in a large settlement.

"You've got a whole group of people out there with serious problems who are not in a position to find an attorney who can help them. For these people, there is no legal system," Ambrose said.

Even for individuals and corporations that win substantial settlements, massive case backlogs and delays can make a victory in circuit court a hollow one.

"Do you think that six years, eight years or 10 years later their monetary award means anything to them, in a real sense?" Ambrose said.

Ambrose is determined to create a court system that works for everyone. The Blueprint for Justice identifies major problems within the court system and offers a practical solution for each.

Too Many Cases

The circuit court has a huge backlog of cases. More than 40,000 new civil cases are filed in Dade's circuit courts each year, which translates to almost 1,000 new cases per judge.

To combat this, one of Ambrose's main objectives as a judge is to use mediation in place of litigation whenever possible. Mediation is a valuable tool used too little, too late by most judges, Ambrose said. By providing parties with an opportunity to resolve their differences before going to trial, Ambrose hopes to greatly reduce the number of new cases heading to court.

Ambrose plans to produce a videotaped seminar that discusses the benefits of mediation. The seminar will be required viewing for all parties that come before him. If the parties do not wish to use mediation after viewing the seminar, a written explanation by both attorneys will be required. If the reasons cited, in Ambrose's opinion, are not valid, the two parties will be ordered to mediate.

"My feeling is that when this mediation approach becomes well-known and required, as I think it will be, the backlog of litigation cases will be tremendously reduced."

Ambrose's blueprint for a more efficient court system includes a number of other reforms, such as the creation of a judicial council to oversee the court system and the implementation of a judicial performance evaluation system.

risky, and potentially costly, for someone with a frivolous or weak case to go to court. **Justice Delayed Is Justice Denied** After a lawsuit is filed, it may take months or years for the case to go to trial. To help eliminate delays, Ambrose plans to enforce whenever possible the Supreme Court of the

in their courtrooms. "This way, attorneys won't have to learn the ropes in 41 different courtrooms at their clients' expense," Ambrose said.

High Standards

Ambrose is committed to maintaining the highest standard of behavior in his courtroom. He promises to maintain proper distance from attorneys to avoid any perception of an "uneven playing field."

He also promises to hold in contempt any attorney or witness who distorts the truth, a practice he says has become far too accepted as of late.

"Once there is a true consequence for perjury, it will act as a tremendous deterrent," Ambrose said.

By keeping his standards high, Ambrose hopes that others will follow his example.

Practical Idealist

Ambrose is an idealist. With his Blueprint for Justice, however, Ambrose has done what few idealists will ever do: transform a vision into a focused, practical plan.

This practical idealism has caught the attention of City of Miami Mayor Javier Suarez, real estate developer Jeb Bush, City of Miami Commissioner Miller Dawkins, attorneys Roy Black, Simon Ferro, and Joe Geller, and dozens of other influential Dade County residents who have endorsed Ambrose.

Setting high goals and working hard for them has always been a trademark of Ambrose's. After working his way through Michigan State University, Ambrose graduated with high honors in 1973 and was invited to become a member of the school's Honors College.

Ambrose attended the prestigious University of Michigan Law School, but soon transferred to the Wayne State University Law School in Detroit to find a job that would allow him to pay his way through school and support his wife.

Ambrose was in the top 10 percent of his freshman law class. He was invited to join the school's law review, the highest honor and distinction given to a first-year law student. Ambrose was published in Wayne Law Review, 22, and went on to become the Review's associate editor.

"I have the intellectual capacity, but because of who I am and what I had to do to get through law school, I developed a practical sense, the ability to talk with and work with waiters, busboys, salesmen, people from all walks of life. These qualities coalesce to make me who I am. That's why I'll be effective as a circuit court judge," Ambrose said.

This practical side will ensure that the people of Dade County will not only get a reformer in Marcus Ambrose, but a top-notch judge as well.

"My mission is to reform the legal system throughout the United States of America. My obligation is to the people of Dade County. They will come first."

"If the Blueprint for Justice gains recognition, and other interested judges and lawyers and politicians promote the blueprint in other courts throughout the state of Florida, and the long so many of the people who are suffering from the legal system, I clearly understand however that I



Marcus Ambrose

State of Florida's guideline that states that a civil jury trial should take place within 18 months, within 12 months for a non-jury trial.

By using his judge's authority to set cases for trial *sua sponte* (on his own authority), Ambrose hopes to send a strong message to attorneys: prepare or beware.

One of the main reasons cases remain in limbo so long is the practice of motion and discovery, a practice which Ambrose calls "one of the most absurd, wasteful and inefficient mechanisms for dispute resolution in our court system."

A motion is a small "battle" before the "war" of the trial where one party asks something of the other party or for judicial intervention. A judge grants or denies this motion. This process is both overused and abused by attorneys, Ambrose said, a tremendous waste of the attorney's time and his client's money.

To get trials to court more quickly, Ambrose will encourage parties to settle their differences without filing a motion. If this can't be done, he will have both parties submit their argument to him to be ruled on. If the motion warrants further attention, a hearing will be arranged via conference call or, as an absolute last resort, in person.

The battle isn't over once the case goes to trial, however. Jury trials, Ambrose said, are far too time-consuming. To reduce the time it takes complete a jury trial, Ambrose will hold meaningful pretrial hearings to eliminate superfluous witnesses and documents, a procedure rarely used properly by most circuit court judges, he said.

Ambrose's blueprint for a more efficient court system includes a number of other reforms, such as the creation of a judicial council to oversee the court system and the implementation of a judicial performance evaluation system.