

**D.A.**

# hopefuls pack the house

*District Attorney*  
**Four prosecutors  
liven up forum,  
announce united  
stand vs. Canlis**

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**SANTA CRUZ** — Four longtime prosecutors competing with each other to become the next district attorney have united in their opposition to acting D.A. Kate Canlis.

The four — a former chief deputy and three high-ranking assistants in the office — have agreed that if one of them should be appointed to the post, they would rally behind that person.

Their action makes a clear statement against Canlis, the front-runner for the job.

"We're united," said Christine McGuire, assistant district attorney and one of eight hopefuls for the post. "If the board appoints one of us four, we will support that person and use our best efforts to unite the D.A.'s Office."

McGuire made the announcement Wednesday at a forum with all candidates. About 200 people attended the event, which was sponsored by five lawyers' groups.

The others involved in the agreement are Assistant District Attorneys Bob Lee and Ariadne Symons and former Chief Deputy District Attorney Jon Hopkins.

Canlis responded by saying the four have agreed on little in the past.

"The alliance is based on opposition to me," she told the crowd.

Canlis later added she thought it was a reaction to news that nearly half of Santa Cruz County's prosecutors have signed a petition supporting her bid to replace Art Danner, who was appointed to a judgeship last month.

Seventeen of 38 lawyers in the office submitted a letter to the county Board of Supervisors supporting Canlis.

In addition, Danner has made it clear he favors Canlis to succeed him. Within an hour of being appointed to the bench, he fired Hopkins, who was chief deputy since 1986, to pave the way for Canlis, the other chief deputy, to be appointed to the job until an election in March 2000.

Supervisors are scheduled to make an appointment Feb. 11. Four out of the five supervisors were at the forum at the Holiday Inn.

During the two-hour event, the applicants were asked to address the apparent factions in the D.A.'s Office.

Canlis answered first by saying that divisions in the office have been grossly exaggerated. She said she has a stream of people coming into her office every day.

"We help one another," she said. "We have no problem being cohesive."

Others disagreed.

"They're deep. They're divisive," Symons said. "They are at all levels. Ms. Canlis and I may well work in different offices. I would not describe the office as happy."

She said the office needs to boost in-house training, widen opportunities for people to do more cases and change the attitude to provide more support.

"Well, I heard rumors ...," said Hopkins, drawing the night's biggest laugh.

He said he believes in creating "an office culture" that allows professionals to grow and be creative.

"I do believe there is a morale problem," Lee said, adding that the office needs to have guidelines and structures.

In her closing remarks, McGuire added that her priority would be to unite the office and provide training and install policies.

The other candidates at the forum were former District Attorney Peter Chang and private-practice lawyers Ron Ruiz and Ed Frey. Steve Muni has withdrawn his application.

Other topics discussed included the death penalty, the three-strikes law and domestic-violence cases.

The forum was co-sponsored by the Santa Cruz County Bar Association, county Criminal Defense Bar, county Latino Lawyers Association, Santa Cruz Trial Lawyers Association and Women Lawyers of Santa Cruz County.