



Penn State hazing death prosecutor loses re-election bid

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Stacy Parks Miller may not have a chance to finish the biggest case she ever started.

Parks Miller, the Centre County district attorney since 2010, lost by a landslide in her bid for a third term Tuesday, falling to an accumulation of local controversies and professional feuds that have dogged her for years.

State College attorney Bernie Cantorna defeated her easily in the Democratic Party primary, and, according to sources who've seen precinct postings, also holds a commanding lead in a battle of write-in votes for the Republican nod.

If Cantorna in fact locks up both nominations, he would be considered a lock to win the county's chief prosecutorial position in November.

That means Parks Miller, who gained national attention earlier this month for bringing criminal charges against 18 Penn State students in connection with the February hazing death of Timothy Piazza, will be out of office at year's end.

The voters' decision adds a fresh layer of complexity to a set of criminal cases that was already expected to be heavily scrutinized as a reference point for future college hazing prosecutions.

Nothing is likely to change in the very near term.

For one thing, Parks Miller will continue to run the district attorney's office and lead the prosecution through the end of 2017. That could be more than enough time for any single defendant to strike a plea agreement.

But if the students - especially those facing more severe charges like aggravated assault and involuntary manslaughter - are intent on going to trial, the case could fall to Cantorna's caseload.

Parks Miller, for her part, could not be reached by PennLive Wednesday but issued a concession statement late Wednesday morning that noted in part:

"I will continue to do my job with the highest levels of skill and integrity and I have loved every minute of helping victims and Centre County... We will not waiver through the end of this year."

Her special deputy on this case, former Attorney General and Montgomery County District Attorney Bruce L. Castor Jr., said he expects Parks Miller will continue to work as hard as she can to resolve as many of the cases before she leaves office.

"It would be a real difficult case for somebody to pick up (mid-stream), even if they were experienced," Castor said. Parks Miller, he added, knows the facts and the law and is confident in her ability to prosecute the case properly.

"She wants to get the case done, and done right," Castor said.

But a lot depends on the defendants, and their calculus over the coming months.

They will have to figure out for themselves if they see any advantage to getting the case resolved before the coming transition, or if it is better to test a new prosecution team.

PennLive left messages with several defense attorneys working the case Wednesday, but did not get any responses.

Meanwhile, **Tom Kline**, the civil attorney representing Piazza's parents, said they have to be prepared to put their trust in Parks Miller - who has clearly won their trust and confidence - and her successor.

"We trust that the prosecution will move forward expeditiously in the next seven months under Ms. Parks Miller, and afterwards," Kline said. "The Piazza family is depending on the successor district attorney to also seek a full measure of justice in the brutal death of their son."

Attempts to reach Cantorna, who has apparently not publicly commented on the Penn State case to date, were not immediately successful for this report.

A private attorney with more than 20 years' experience, Cantorna's campaign biography suggests he has never worked as a prosecutor, but has had prior career experience as an accountant and as a public defender.

His campaign has been targeted at restoring trust in what he called "even-handed law enforcement," which he asserted has been missing in Parks Miller's administration.

Here's one thing that is certain.

The next court date in the Piazza case is June 12, when preliminary hearings for all 18 defendants have been scheduled in Bellefonte.