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CONDUCT OF HEARING PRAISED

Experts say Granholm shows judicial qualities

BY DAVID ASHENFELTER • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • SEPTEMBER 4, 2008

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If Gov. Jennifer Granholm ever gets tired of politics, she could have a future as a judge, legal experts said Wednesday.

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They said the governor was prompt, attentive, fair and courteous -- qualities that lawyers expect from a judge -- during Wednesday's first day of the removal hearing for Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick.

"I was really impressed," University of Detroit Mercy law professor Larry Dubin said. "I had no idea what kind of circus this would turn out to be. But because of

the governor's knowledge of the law, this proceeding had much more of an authentic judicial flavor than it would have had it been conducted by a governor who lacked her legal background."

Wayne State University law professor Peter Henning, a former Justice Department lawyer, said Granholm demonstrated that she has all the makings of a federal district judge.

"She was very prepared, knew the flow of the case and where the lawyers were going," Henning said. "She did what a good district judge does -- she was on top of the evidence. Some judges try to micromanage the proceedings. But she didn't fall into that trap. She let the lawyers present their case."

Granholm, a Harvard Law School grad, began her legal career as a clerk for



RASHAUN RUCKER/Detroit Free Press

Gov. Jennifer Granholm addresses mayoral counsel Sharon McPhail. At one point she urged McPhail to stick to the hearing's central issues.

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federal Appeals Court Judge Damon Keith. Later, she served as a federal prosecutor in Detroit, the chief lawyer for Wayne County and state attorney general.

She made it clear from the outset that she didn't want to be called "Judge." She also told the audience that she didn't want anyone to stand when she entered and left the room, and wore a dark pin-striped suit rather than a black robe.

Speaking softly but firmly from a slightly elevated bench, Granholm questioned witnesses to make sure she understood their testimony.

She also controlled the proceedings.

At one point, she urged mayoral lawyer Sharon McPhail to get back on point during the questioning of attorney Mike Stefani, who represented fired Deputy Police Chief Gary Brown in last year's police whistle-blower lawsuit, which sparked the text message scandal.

When McPhail asked Stefani whether the mayor committed perjury, fired Brown or thought his quest for text messages was a violation of federal law, Granholm told McPhail she was getting "far afield" and urged her to stick to the central issues of the hearing -- whether Kilpatrick approved the \$8.4-million whistle-blower settlement for personal gain and whether he kept the City Council in the dark about the text messages.

Contact **DAVID ASHENFELTER** at dashenfelter@freepress.com.


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 **speakout** wrote:
Anybody that questions whether or not Sharon McPhail is a lunatic needs to either watch the court proceedings or read the transcripts. This woman is unfit and woefully unqualified to practice law. She was utterly incompetent and as far as unintentional humor goes, she was easily a ten.
09/04/2008 12:57:17 p.m. EDT


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 **TakiM** wrote:
Granholm is pretty hot.
09/04/2008 10:58:45 a.m. EDT

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 **NotaryPublix** wrote:
Granholm rocked yesterday! She was firm, focused and fair. She kept things on track and had a calmness and confidence that made you feel like this thing was in good hands. I would LOVE to see her as a judge... federal or state supreme court, etc. She would be AWESOME!!!
And as a side note, can we stop busting her balls about being a crappy governor? I think ANYONE in the governor's role right now would be pretty screwed given the economy, etc.
09/04/2008 10:13:20 a.m. EDT

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She should have stuck with the Law all along.
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