

Wilson defeats Jennings after fierce campaign

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Scarlett Wilson hugs legal assistant Naomi Nation at Pearlz in West Ashley after winning the Republican nomination for the 9th Circuit Solicitor's office.

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Scarlett Wilson high-fives a supporter at Pearlz in West Ashley after winning the Republican nomination for the 9th Circuit Solicitor's office.

Video

Scarlett Wilson won the race for 9th Circuit Solicitor against Blair Jennings Tuesday evening.

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Scarlett Wilson's blowout win in Tuesday's Republican primary means the region is on the verge of having its first elected female prosecutor.

The 15-year courtroom veteran jumped out to a big lead in Charleston County and she successfully turned back rival Blair Jennings to win the Republican nomination for 9th Circuit Solicitor.

The victory ends a heated courthouse duel that began last September.

"Y'all are smarter and more astute than I could imagine," the first-time candidate told supporters during her victory celebration.

With no Democrat in the race, Wilson, 40, is practically assured a four-year term in office after the November general election.

Unofficial results for both Berkeley and Charleston counties gave her 58 percent of the two-county vote to Jennings' 42 percent, with about 99 percent of precincts reporting.

Jennings, who had prosecuted cases in Berkeley County, failed to run strong there, while Wilson was the overwhelming favorite among Charleston County voters.

Jennings conceded before 9 p.m. He said he respected Wilson, and that, despite the loss, he was pleased to have taken part in the process. "It's been a long year for everybody," he added, saying he wanted to take some time to reflect.

Wilson was appointed solicitor by Gov. Mark Sanford last year in the wake of former Solicitor Ralph Hoisington's death from pancreatic cancer. She had been Hoisington's chief lieutenant in Charleston.

"I'm grateful the voters affirmed Ralph's choice and they affirmed Gov. Sanford's choice," Wilson said. She said she also was "grateful for Berkeley voters showing up the way they did."

Jennings will return to his job helping out on prosecutions in the Dorchester County Solicitor's Office and wind down his position as counsel for Berkeley County Sheriff Wayne DeWitt.

The result ends a rift between the two candidates that began last summer after Wilson asked Jennings to quit or face being fired from his post as deputy solicitor in charge of the circuit's Berkeley County office. She cited what appeared to be a lack of his support for her new administration, though Jennings said the move was motivated by politics.

During the campaign, both candidates cited their prosecution records, a desire to put violent criminals behind bars and, for a time, promises to help wage the war on illegal immigrants who commit crimes here. But Jennings also hit Wilson hard in TV ads and mail-outs, suggesting she was soft on criminals.

Wilson mainly responded with a more-positive TV advertising campaign, using former state Attorney General Charlie Condon as a surrogate who spoke on her behalf.

After a short career as a state prosecutor in Columbia, in 1995 Wilson became a federal prosecutor and would become part of the U.S. Attorney's Office Violent Crimes Task Force. She joined the Charleston solicitor's office in 2000 when Hoisington made her his second in command after he was first elected.