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Harris County District Attorney

KIM K. OGG

Houston legal veterans join leadership team

Harris County District Attorney Kim Ogg announced Wednesday that two veteran members of the Houston legal community -men from traditionally opposite corners -are joining her leadership team.

Defense lawyer and long-time federal public defender Tom Berg will serve as First Assistant and oversee all lawyers engaged in criminal prosecutions.

Ruben Perez, a career prosecutor for more than 36 years, will be Chief of the Special Crimes Bureau, which traditionally prosecutes such offenses as organized crime, major fraud, major narcotics and money laundering.

Berg and Perez are the latest high profile additions to the more than 700 employees at the Harris County District Attorney's Office.

They are scheduled to start in mid-February.

"Both have a long history of standing up for what they believe in," Ogg said. "We promised experience, diversity and integrity. With these men, the public can be assured of all three."

Berg, who retired as a colonel in the Army Reserve, distinguished himself as a military lawyer while challenging the U.S. government's use of torture at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

"He put his own career in jeopardy because he believes in the higher principles of law," Ogg said. "Anybody with that kind of character, along with 40 years of experience, has the kind of qualifications we need in this office."

Berg was born in Washington, D.C. and as the son of a Foreign Service Officer, attended elementary school through high school in Mexico City. He graduated from Rice University and the University of Houston.

While in the military, Berg served in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as Bosnia-Herzegovina.

He was as a defense lawyer and prosecutor as well as a trial and appellate judge in the military. He earned a master's degree in strategic studies from the Army War College.

"I have never engaged in legal decision-making on the basis of popularity," Berg said. "The law leads you to the right answers."

Berg spent 27 years at the Federal Public Defender's Office in Houston, including 19 as the First Assistant there.

Berg speaks fluent Spanish. He is a former trustee and director for the League of Women Voters of the Houston Area and is vice president of Latino Giving Houston, a group that encourages philanthropy.

Perez, who also speaks fluent Spanish, started out in 1980 prosecuting misdemeanors in Houston's municipal court system.

A year later, he joined the Harris County District Attorney's office and rose to the rank of Chief Prosecutor.

After 11 years, he was hired by the Department of Justice, where he has been an assistant U.S. attorney since 1992.

"Ruben is a career prosecutor. He is coming home," Ogg said.

"He has prosecuted hate crimes, protected civil rights and gone after major drug and human trafficking organizations," Ogg said. "He will provide experienced leadership for the Special Crimes Bureau."

Perez is a native of Seguin and graduated from Southwest Texas State University and the Thurgood Marshall School of Law.

As a federal prosecutor for the U.S. Southern District of Texas, Perez has served in a variety of positions, including as chief of the Human Trafficking and Civil Rights Unit and as a member of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force.

"We are going to aggressively prosecute people based on where the evidence takes us," he said. "At the same time, we must respect the civil rights of everyone in America."

"Just as importantly, victims have a right to be represented by someone seeking justice on their behalf too," he said.

Perez was the lead federal prosecutor in a major sex-trafficking case that took down a notorious Houston brothel that drew thousands of customers and operated for years by using women and teenagers illegally held against their will and forced into prostitution.

That prosecution also resulted in the forfeiture of millions of dollars in assets from the trafficking organization.

Perez is a three-time winner of the Director's Award from the Executive Office for United States Attorneys for the U.S. Department of Justice.

He was also recognized by the director of the FBI for prosecuting five people who burned a cross at the home of an African American family in Katy.

Perez has taught classes to fellow law-enforcement officials on how to handle human trafficking cases in the United States and abroad and frequently lectures on Civil Rights issues.

He is a member of the Tejano Music Hall of Fame.

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