

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 155, No. 83

Tuesday, April 28, 2009

Durbin names panelists to screen judges

By Pat Milhizer
Law Bulletin staff writer

In a process not used since the Clinton administration, U.S. Sen. Richard J. Durbin has formed screening committees to help appoint federal judges, U.S. attorneys and U.S. marshals serving in Illinois.

Committee members are assigned to one of three panels based on where they live, and the group includes law professors, bar association leaders, retired judges and litigators who have served on both sides of the courtroom.

And there's already work to be done.

The committees will soon start reviewing applications and making recommendations to Durbin on federal judge seats in the Northern District; the U.S. attorney positions in the Central and Southern districts; and the U.S. marshal positions in all three districts.

Applications for these positions are available at www.durbin.senate.gov/issues/crime.cfm. The deadline to submit applications is May 11.

In the Northern District, Chief Judge James F. Holderman said that there is one judicial vacancy now and two more are expected.

The District Court was unable to fill the vacancy created in March 2008 when Mark R. Filip left to become deputy attorney general. The court also expects that U.S. District Judges Robert W. Gettleman and David H. Coar will take senior status on May 5 and Aug. 12, respectively.

"My interest is to get the best possible judges on the bench in the shortest period of time.... It's been over a year that we've gone shorthanded," Holderman said.

The screening committees will review the applications and interview applicants and their references. They will then recommend several names to Durbin for consideration in each vacancy.

Durbin conducts the interviews of finalists and will consult with the junior senator from Illinois, who is Roland W. Burris, and Republican House members before submitting his picks to President Obama.

Obama then would submit nominations to the

U.S. Senate, where candidates are reviewed by the Senate Judiciary Committee. Durbin is a member of that committee.

If approved by the Judiciary Committee, the nominee receives a vote by the full Senate.

It typically takes about six months from the time of nomination to the confirmation for federal judges, Durbin's office said. U.S. attorneys and marshals usually are appointed more quickly because they don't have to undergo a formal confirmation hearing in the Senate.

The screening committees that will advise Durbin are located in the north, central and southern parts of the state.

Abner J. Mikva, former White House counsel and chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, chairs the Northern District Committee.

He is joined by Demetrius E. Carney of Perkins, Coie LLP; Paul R. Cicero of Cicero & France; Fay Clayton of Robinson, Curley & Clayton P.C.; Philip Harnett Corboy Jr. of Corboy & Demetrio P.C.; Kevin M. Forde of Kevin M. Forde Ltd.; Patricia Brown Holmes of Schiff, Hardin LLP; Betty Y. Jang of CVS Caremark; Michele Ilene Ruiz of Sidley, Austin LLP, and Diana C. White of the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago.

The Southern District Committee is chaired by Sheila J. Simon of Southern Illinois University School of Law.

Joining Simon are Frederick J. Hess of Lewis, Rice & Fingersh; Thomas Q. Keefe Jr. of Thomas Q. Keefe Jr. P.C.; Emily J. Kirk of SimmonsCooper LLC; Dianne Meeks of One Village, and Alexis D. Otis-Lewis, a retired associate judge of the 20th Judicial Circuit.

James R. Potter of Londrigan, Potter & Randle P.C. will chair the Central District Committee that consists of Clarence A. Darrow, a retired 14th Judicial Circuit judge; Robert J. Eggers, a retired 7th Judicial Circuit judge; sole practitioner Donald R. Jackson; Stacey E. Lynch of the Dorris Law Firm P.C., and Lucinda Awerkamp of Awerkamp & McClain P.C.