

Durbin, Duckworth Announce Screening Committees for Judicial, U.S. Attorney, U.S. Marshal Nominations

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CHICAGO—U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) today announced the formation of three screening committees to assist the Senators in evaluating candidates for vacant U.S. Attorney, U.S. Marshal, and federal judgeship positions in Illinois. The Senators are establishing separate screening committees for each of Illinois' three federal districts. The task of the screening committees is to review and vet candidates for the vacancies and advise the Senators regarding the candidates' qualifications and fitness for the position.

The Senators informed the White House Counsel in a letter on May 2 that they would be establishing these committees to assist in performing due diligence on prospective nominees. A copy of this letter can be found [here](#).

The Senators' Screening Committee in the Northern District of Illinois will be chaired by the Honorable David Coar (ret.), former U.S. District Court Judge for the Northern District of Illinois. The other members of the Northern District Committee are Michael Chu, Laurie Mikva, Carlina Tapia-Ruano, and Zaldwaynaka ("Z") Scott.

The Senators' Screening Committee in the Central District of Illinois will be chaired by the Honorable Ronald Spears (ret.), formerly a Judge on the Illinois Fourth Judicial Circuit. The other members of the Central District Committee are Ted Gottfried, Donald Jackson, Lucinda Awerkamp McClain, and Ruth Waller.

The Senators' Screening Committee in the Southern District of Illinois will be chaired by the Honorable G. Patrick Murphy (ret.), former U.S. District Court Judge for the Southern District of Illinois. The other members of the Southern District Committee are the Honorable Bruce Stewart (ret.), Steve Stone, the Honorable Milton Wharton (ret.), and Lois Wood.

Biographies of each member of the screening committees can be found below.

"These screening committees combine deep legal and judicial experience from across our state. These distinguished Illinoisans will help advise Senator Duckworth and me as we evaluate candidates for some of the most important jobs in Illinois," said Durbin. **"I thank the members of the screening committees for their willingness to serve."**

"I take my constitutional responsibility to advise and consent seriously. The knowledge, insight and expertise of each of the screening committee members will be invaluable as Senator Durbin and I consider nominees to fill critical positions in the judicial system," said Duckworth. **"I thank the members for their commitment to serving the people of Illinois."**

The Senators' screening committees will review candidates identified by the Trump Administration and the Illinois Republican Congressional delegation for vacant U.S. Attorney, U.S. Marshal, and federal judgeship positions. Once the President submits a nomination to the U.S. Senate, the nominee will be reviewed by the Senate Judiciary Committee, of which Senator Durbin is a member, and will receive a vote in the committee. The approval of both home state Senators is required for the Senate Judiciary Committee to take up and consider any U.S. Attorney, U.S. Marshal, and federal district or circuit court nominee. If a nomination is approved by the Judiciary Committee, the nomination will be sent to the full Senate for consideration.

Biographies for Screening Committee Members

Northern District

Chair

The Honorable David H. Coar (Ret.): Judge Coar served as a United States District Judge for the Northern District of Illinois for sixteen years, from 1994-2010. He had previously served the Northern District for eight years as a United States Bankruptcy Judge and for three years as a United States Bankruptcy Trustee. Judge Coar taught for over a decade at DePaul University College of Law as an Associate Professor of Law and additionally served as Associate Dean. He has also worked in private practice and as an arbitrator. Judge Coar received his B.A. from Syracuse University, his J.D. from Loyola University Law School, and his L.L.M. from Harvard Law School. He is a veteran of the United States Marine Corps Reserves.

Members

Michael Chu. Mr. Chu is a partner at the Chicago office of McDermott Will & Emery. Mr. Chu is the board chair of Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Chicago and was the former president of the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (2004-2005). He is the current board chair of the Chicago Committee on Minorities in Large Law Firms and chair of the Chicago Illini Leadership Council. He received his B.S. from the University of Illinois in 1989 and his J.D. from the William and Mary Law School in 1992.

Laurie Mikva. Ms. Mikva is a clinical assistant professor at Northwestern Pritzker School of Law. She previously worked as an attorney at the Illinois Department of Employment Security and the Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation, and also served as an assistant public defender in the Champaign County Public Defender's Office and the Office of the Maryland Public Defender, Appellate Division. She is a Commissioner on the Illinois Court of Claims, and she also serves on the Board of Directors for the Legal Services Corporation and on the American Bar Association Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service. She received her B.A. from Beloit College and her J.D. from New York University School of Law.

Carlina Tapia-Ruano. Ms. Tapia-Ruano is the principal and founder of the Chicago office of Tapia-Ruano & Gunn PC. She has practiced in the field of immigration law for over thirty years, focusing on family and employment matters. She is a former president of the American Immigration Lawyers Association and chair of the Chicago Bar Association Section on Immigration Law. Ms. Tapia-Ruano has taught as an adjunct professor at IIT-Chicago Kent School of Law and DePaul University College of Law. She received her B.A. from Illinois Wesleyan University and J.D. from DePaul University College of Law.

Zaldwaynaka (“Z”) Scott. Ms. Scott is currently a partner in the Chicago office of Foley & Lardner LLP. From 1987 to 2003, she worked as a federal criminal prosecutor in the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of Illinois, serving in various management positions including Chief of the General Crimes Section. After her service at the U.S. Attorney’s Office, she served as Executive Inspector General for the Office of Governor of Illinois (2003-05). She also served for four years in the Office of the Corporation Counsel for the City of Chicago (1983-87). She has taught as an adjunct instructor at Northwestern University School of Law, the University of Chicago Law School, and The John Marshall School of Law. She received her B.S. from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign and her J.D. from the Indiana University School of Law-Bloomington.

Central District

Chair

The Honorable Ronald Spears (ret.): Judge Spears served as a judge in the Fourth Judicial Circuit in Taylorville from 1993- 2015. From 1979-1993, he worked at Miley, Meyer, Austin, Spears and Romano P.C. in Taylorville and served for several years as the city attorney. Previously he served as a judicial law clerk to U.S. District Court Judge J. Waldo Ackerman in the Central District of Illinois. Currently he works as a mediator and arbitrator with Spears Dispute Resolution. He has been active in many bar associations and served as president of the Illinois Judges Association. Judge Spears served in the Illinois Army National Guard from 1972-2006, retiring at the rank of colonel. He was in the Judge Advocate General’s Corps. He has a B.A. from the University of Illinois and a J.D. from Southern Illinois University School of Law.

Members

Ted Gottfried. Mr. Gottfried served as the Director of the State Appellate Defender in Springfield from 1972-2008, overseeing legal representation in over 40,000 criminal cases in the Appellate and Supreme Courts of Illinois. He has received numerous honors and awards for his service including the Access to Justice special recognition from the Illinois State Bar Association, the Gideon Award from the Illinois Public Defender Association, and a Meritorious Service Award presented by Governor Richard Ogilvie. He received his B.A. from Roosevelt University and his J.D. from John Marshall Law School.

Donald Jackson. Mr. Jackson is a Peoria-based solo practitioner, specializing in civil rights and workplace and disability discrimination. He is a former president of the Peoria chapter of the NAACP and the NAACP Illinois State Conference. Mr. Jackson was a former attorney for the National Labor Relations Board and the Peoria County

Public Defender's Office. He received his J.D. from the University of Illinois College of Law.

Lucinda Awerkamp McClain. Ms. McClain worked for over 3 decades at the Quincy law firm of Awerkamp & McClain. She has served as director of the Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation and director of the Large District Council of the Illinois Association of School Boards. She has also served as board president or member of many community organizations including Quincy University, the Community Foundation of the Quincy Area, Great River Economic Development Foundation, Quincy Public Library, the Quincy Public School Board, Quincy Notre Dame School Board and the Quincy Area Chamber of Commerce. She received her B.A. from Quincy University and her J.D. from St. Louis University School of Law.

Ruth Waller: Ms. Waller is the Assistant State's Attorney in Macon County, where she serves as the senior supervisor of the Child Support Division. Before her work in the State's Attorney's Office, she was a partner in the law firm of Johnson, Waller & Chiligris. Ms. Waller is a former president of the Springfield Coalition of Black Attorneys and has previously served on the boards of the Southern Illinois University School of Law, Millikin University, and Decatur Mental Health Center. She currently serves on several boards, including that of the FBI Citizens Academy and Land of Lincoln Credit Union. She received her B.A. from the University of Illinois and J.D. from Southern Illinois University School of Law.

Southern District

Chair

The Honorable G. Patrick Murphy (ret.): Judge Murphy served as a United States District Judge for the Southern District of Illinois for fifteen years, including serving as the chief judge of the SDIL from 2000-2007. He worked in private practice in Marion prior to his service on the bench and has returned to private practice at the law firm Murphy & Murphy, LLC. He received his B.S. from Southern Illinois University and his J.D. from the Southern Illinois University School of Law. He served in the United States Marine Corps from 1966-1969.

Members

The Honorable Bruce Stewart (ret.): Judge Stewart served as an Appellate Judge for the Fifth District Appellate Court of the State of Illinois for ten years (2006-2016). He was appointed Circuit Judge of the First Judicial Circuit in 1995 and elected to that position in 1996. In 2006, he was elected to the Fifth District Appellate Court. Prior to his service on the bench, Judge Stewart worked in private practice for nineteen years. He

served on the board of directors for the Illinois Judges' Association. He received his B. A. from Southern Illinois University in 1973 and J.D. from Southern Illinois University School of Law in 1976.

Steve Stone: Mr. Stone currently works as a partner at Howerton, Dorris, Stone & Lambert in Marion. He worked as an associate at Harris, Lambert, Howerton & Dorris and Brandon & Schmidt in Carbondale. He is an adjunct professor at Southern Illinois University School of Law. Mr. Stone received his B.A. from Southern Illinois University Carbondale in 1987 and his J.D. from Southern Illinois University School of Law in 1990.

The Honorable Milton Wharton (ret.). Judge Wharton served as a judge on the Illinois 20th Judicial Circuit from 1988 until 2011. He previously served as an associate judge in St. Clair County Circuit Court from 1976-1988. He also worked in the St. Clair County Public Defender's Office. He is a past president of the St. Clair County Bar Association and a past Executive Board Member of the East St. Louis Chapter of the NAACP, and he also taught at Lindenwood University – Belleville. He currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Greater St. Louis Area Council- Boy Scouts of America and was a founder and current board member of the Court Appointed Special Advocate Program of Southwestern Illinois. He received his B.S. from Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville and his J.D. from DePaul University College of Law.

Lois Wood. Ms. Wood has served since 2004 as the executive director of the Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation, a non-profit that provides free civil legal services to low income persons, senior citizens, and veterans in central and southern Illinois. Based in East St. Louis, Wood has worked with Land of Lincoln for over forty years as a staff attorney, managing attorney and executive director. She will retire from Land of Lincoln this year. She has previously served as the Chair of the Illinois State Bar Association Standing Committee on Delivery of Legal Services, and is currently Vice-Chair of the Committee on Legal Education, Admission and Competence. She received her B.A. from Michigan State University and her J.D. from Harvard Law School.