



PRESIDENT CHOOSES CONSERVATIVE FOR SUPREME COURT

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President Bush's choice of Judge John Roberts Jr. for the Supreme Court could change the direction of law for decades to come.

"John Roberts has devoted his entire professional life to the cause of justice," Mr. Bush said in a prime-time announcement at the White House, "and is widely admired for his intellect his sound judgment and his personal decency."

If confirmed by the U.S. Senate, Roberts will replace Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who has been known as a "swing vote" on the high court that has been closely divided on issues such as abortion, affirmative action, states' rights and the death penalty.

Who is Judge Roberts?

The 50-year-old Roberts was born in Buffalo, N.Y., raised in Indiana and graduated from both Harvard University and Harvard Law School.

He worked for presidents Reagan and George H.W. Bush and has served on the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C. since 2001.

He is considered a solid conservative who some analysts think could mirror the viewpoints of both Justice Clarence Thomas and Justice Antonin Scalia, both openly admired by President Bush.

The president went with "a nominee who will narrowly interpret the Constitution, who will not read new rights into the Constitution beyond the rights that are explicitly stated in that document, who will, as President Bush said, apply the law, not make up the law from the bench," legal reporter Jan Crawford Greenburg said.

Roberts has argued 39 cases before the Supreme Court and won 25 of them.

"I always got a lump in my throat whenever I walked up those marble steps to argue a case before the court, and I don't think it was just from the nerves," Roberts said when President Bush announced his nomination.

The confirmation process

President Bush has stated that he would like a new justice in place before the next Supreme Court session, which begins in October.

"I urge the Senate to rise to the occasion, to provide a fair and civil process and to have Judge Roberts in place before the next court session begins," the president said at a recent speech in Baltimore.

The Senate Judiciary Committee will hold hearings and then make a recommendation to the full Senate.

According to Senate rules, the only way that Democrats can stop Roberts' nomination is through the use of a filibuster, a long series of speeches meant to prevent a vote.

But earlier this spring, a group of 14 centrist senators agreed that the filibuster would only be used in "extraordinary circumstances."

Key senators who brokered that agreement said last week that Roberts' nomination would not justify a Democratic filibuster.

"Everybody ought to cool their jets on this and let the process work," Nebraska Democratic Senator Ben Nelson told the Washington Post.

A sure thing?

Because he was a lawyer who argued cases for clients instead of writing his own opinions until 2003, "His legal record, and views on the record, it's very thin. And there's not a lot there for Democrats looking for inflammatory statements or things that they might use to hold against him," said Greenburg.

Liberal groups such as the legal group Alliance for Justice and the abortion rights group Planned Parenthood are pushing the Senate Judiciary Committee to ask deep questions.

Judge Roberts told senators in 2003 that he would abide by *Roe v. Wade*, the decision that defined a woman's right to have an abortion in the United States, while on a lower court because it was the law of the land.

However, Democrats point out that he would be in a position to redefine that law on the high court.

"The Supreme Court is totally different than courts of appeals," said New York Senator Charles Schumer, a Democratic member of the Judiciary Committee who voted against confirming Roberts to the appeals court in 2003. "The nominee for the Supreme Court has the broadest jurisdiction and ability to change people's lives."

Conservative groups have cheered the nomination and expect Roberts to be confirmed.

"I think it's going to be hard for the left to fight him," Paul Weyrich, chairman of the Free Congress Foundation told the New York Times.

--Compiled by Annie Schleicher for NewsHour Extra

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