

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin

April 14, 2010 Volume: 156 Issue: 72

1Wood is said to be on Obama's list to fill U.S. Supreme Court vacancyPatricia MansonBy Patricia Manson
Law Bulletin staff writer2010-04-14_v_1D.jpgDiane P. Wood

[Diane P. Wood](#) once described serving as a law clerk to the late U.S. Supreme Court Justice Harry A. Blackmun as "probably the biggest single turning point in my entire career."

Wood may find herself back at the high court now that Justice [John Paul Stevens](#) has announced he will retire this summer.

Wood is rumored to be one of the leading contenders to fill Stevens' seat.

If she is appointed to the position, she will — as Stevens did nearly 35 years ago — move to the Supreme Court from the Chicago-based 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Wood, 59, was born in Plainfield, N.J., and lived in an nearby community until her family moved to Texas when she was a teenager.

She graduated from Westchester High School in Houston in 1968. She then went on to receive an undergraduate degree in English in 1971 and a law degree in 1975 at the University of Texas.

After completing law school, Wood clerked first for the late Judge Irving L. Goldberg of the 5th Circuit and then for Blackmun.

In a 1997 interview with the Law Bulletin, Wood said the latter clerkship exposed her to all areas of the law.

She said reading petitions filed by parties seeking review before the high court taught her to quickly assess the merits of legal arguments advanced by litigants.

Wood worked for the U.S. State Department as an attorney-adviser from 1977 to 1978 and then joined the law firm Covington & Burling in Washington, D.C., as an associate.

In 1980, she left private practice to teach, first at Georgetown University Law Center and then at the University of Chicago Law School.

In addition to teaching at U of C, Wood served as associate dean at the law school from 1989 to 1992.

In 1993, she joined the U.S. Justice Department's Antitrust Division in Washington as deputy assistant attorney general for international, appellate and policy matters.

She worked on cases involving joint ventures between American and European telecommunications companies. She also worked on an antitrust case involving Microsoft Corp. that led to a 1995 consent decree.

Wood has written extensively on antitrust law — the area that was the focus of Stevens' law practice in Chicago before his appointment to the 7th Circuit — as well as on federal civil procedure and international trade and business.

In March 1995, President Bill Clinton nominated Wood to the 7th Circuit to fill the vacancy created when Judge [William J. Bauer](#) took senior status. The U.S. Senate confirmed the nomination three months later in a unanimous vote.

During her 15 years on the bench, Wood has earned a reputation as a "solid judge" who is "well-respected by her colleagues and by the bar," said Indianapolis attorney [Bradley L. Williams](#) of Ice, Miller LLP.

Professor [Geoffrey R. Stone](#), who was the dean of U of C Law School when Wood was associate dean, described her as "a first-rate lawyer" and "accomplished scholar" who went on to become "an extremely successful judge."

"She's tough-minded, very professional, extremely accomplished as a lawyer, a scholar and certainly as a judge," Stone said.

When she took the bench, Wood joined a court that had only one other female judge, [Ilana Diamond Rovner](#).

But U.S. District Judge [Ann Claire Williams](#)' elevation to the 7th Circuit a few years later brought enough women on the appeals court to make possible its first all-female panel.

Wood, Williams and Rovner served on that panel on Sept. 21, 2000.

"It was wonderful," Wood said immediately after hearing arguments that day in cases that included a criminal appeal, a labor matter and litigation that had been initiated by a Chicago public school principal.

The appointment of Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice [Diane S. Sykes](#) to the 7th Circuit has made appellate panels that include two or three women a more common sight in the Dirksen Federal Courthouse.

Like other judges on the 7th Circuit, Wood is not shy about questioning lawyers during oral argument.

Chicago attorney [James R. Figliulo](#) of Figliulo & Silverman P.C. said Wood's queries go to the heart of the issues involved in a case. He said she will push a lawyer whose answer is not on point.

"She's very respectful, but she's not vanilla," Figliulo said. "She doesn't just accept an answer."

In the 1997 interview, Wood said lawyers who appear before the 7th Circuit should be ready to engage in a conversation with the judges hearing their case. She said the worst thing a lawyer could do in that situation, at least in her opinion, was to fail to prepare for argument.

"If we ask a question about the record and the lawyer stands there and says, 'Oh, it's been six months since I've looked at that,' I'm not pleased with that answer," Wood said in the interview. "The question wouldn't be asked if it weren't important to one of the judges on the panel, maybe to all three."

Since joining the 7th Circuit, Wood has continued to teach at U of C Law School as a senior lecturer.

Obama taught at the school, first as a lecturer and then as a senior lecturer, from 1992 under his election to the U.S. Senate in 2004.

Last year, Wood was among the finalists interviewed by Obama for the vacancy on the Supreme Court created by the retirement of Justice David H. Souter. That seat ultimately went to Judge Sonia Sotomayor of the 2d Circuit.

Wood's areas of interest extend beyond the law. She travels, reads literature and plays the oboe and English horn in

the Chicago Bar Association Symphony Orchestra.

Wood speaks French very well and German and Russian to a lesser degree of proficiency.

Her knowledge of French came in handy when students studying at the University of Bordeaux in France to become judges spend a day at the Dirksen Federal Courthouse in September 2007. While other speakers addressed the students in English, Wood spoke to them in their native language.

She is married to Dr. Robert L. Sufit, a professor of neurology at Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University.

Wood has three children from a previous marriage and three stepchildren.

pmanson@lbpc.com

©2010 by Law Bulletin Publishing Company. Content on this site is protected by the copyright laws of the United States. The copyright laws prohibit any copying, redistributing, or retransmitting of any copyright-protected material. The content is NOT WARRANTED as to quality, accuracy or completeness, but is believed to be accurate at the time of compilation. Web sites for other organizations are referenced at this site, however the Law Bulletin does not endorse or imply endorsement as to the content of these web sites. By using this site you agree to the [Terms, Conditions and Disclaimer](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).