
N.J. abuzz about Alito

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If his nomination is approved, Samuel Alito would become the second Trenton native on the U.S. Supreme Court, along with Justice Antonin Scalia.

Alito's ties to New Jersey are longer-standing than those of Scalia, whose family moved to New York City when he was 5.

Alito -- a 55-year-old resident of West Caldwell, Essex County, and Princeton graduate, who was nominated to the nation's highest court by President Bush on Monday -- served as the U.S. Attorney for New Jersey from 1987 to 1990.

The office "ran very well," said Haddon Heights lawyer Rocco C. Cipparone Jr., whom Alito hired as a federal prosecutor in 1988. "I think he . . . revolutionized the way the U.S. Attorney's Office in New Jersey was run."

"I found him extremely professional in the way he dealt not only with the staff but with outside attorneys," Cipparone said. He called the judge a "very affable individual, actually very humble in his demeanor."

Cipparone, a criminal-defense attorney and a Republican, said Alito is an "excellent choice" for the high court.

"He really has, I think, both the intellect and the judicial temperament necessary for somebody in such a significant position," he said.

Bush named Alito, an unquestioned conservative, to replace Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

The nomination, which came four days after Harriet Miers withdrew her name because of widespread opposition from the president's conservative base, satisfied his supporters on the political right but invited a battle with Democrats.

Alito has served since 1990 on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 3rd Circuit, where he

has participated in 3,500 cases and written about 300 opinions. He was named to that job by Bush's father.

The court, based in Philadelphia, hears appeals of federal court decisions in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Alito's conservative record as an appellate judge, especially on an important abortion case, already has prompted criticism from opponents like U.S. Rep. Rob Andrews, D-Haddon Heights.

In a statement, Andrews said he had "grave misgivings" about the nomination.

While the Senate, not the House of Representatives, votes on confirming Supreme Court justices, Andrews said that Alito "supported upholding a law that would require women to obtain a husband's consent prior to seeking an abortion -- even in the case of abusive situations.

"I disagree with his decision and so did the United States Supreme Court on the grounds that it is entirely inconsistent with the existing law under Roe v. Wade," Andrews said.

U.S. Sen. Jon Corzine, D-Hoboken, said Monday that he was pleased to have a nominee from New Jersey but saw Alito's nomination as an attempt by President Bush to "appease radical conservatives in his party."

"While I look forward to learning all I can about Judge Alito, based on what I know so far, I am deeply concerned that he will dramatically shift the balance of the court to the right," Corzine said in a statement.

Woodbury resident Michael Scott, 36, said he opposed Alito's nomination because of his stance on abortion.

"You can't dictate what a woman wants to do with her body, so that's why I'm all for choice. All I needed to hear was that," Scott said.

Bush moved quickly to replace Miers, who withdrew as a Supreme Court pick on Thursday. Announcing his decision at the White House with Alito by his side, the president called Alito "one of the most accomplished and respected judges in America."

If confirmed by the Senate, Alito would replace the retiring O'Connor, who has been a centrist and the swing vote in many closely decided cases.

Despite the political battle over his selection, Alito's Italian-American heritage is a point of pride for the National Italian American Foundation.

Philadelphia lawyer Joseph V. Del Raso, the foundation's executive vice president, credited Alito's success to a foundation of strong family and solid education.

"He's a well-respected jurist and even though we're proud as Italian-Americans, we also would always expect the president to make a nomination to the court of the most qualified people. So, as a community we weren't out there saying we want an Italian-American on the court. It's just that now the decision was made and it happens to be somebody who we share a common heritage with . . . We're thrilled about it," he said.

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