

Statement of
The Honorable John Cornyn

United States Senator
Texas
July 7, 2004

Today the Committee will consider the nomination of an exceptional Texas jurist to serve on the federal district court in the Eastern District of Texas.

I want to begin by thanking the Chairman of the committee, Senator Hatch, for scheduling today's hearing. I look forward to moving this nomination through the committee - and through the Senate - over the next few weeks.

I also want to thank Senator Leahy and his staff for working so cooperatively to make today's hearing possible. After a few brief introductory remarks, I will turn the floor over to him for any remarks that he might have, and then we will be very pleased to hear from the senior senator from Texas - who knows the nominee quite well and who I know is personally very supportive of him.

The vacancy we hope to fill with the nomination before us today was created by the untimely passing of Chief Judge John H. Hannah, Jr. Judge Hannah was a good man and a distinguished jurist. His family's loss was also a great loss to the state of Texas.

I enjoyed working with Judge Hannah. Senator Hutchison and I worked closely with him just last year on legislation to authorize the Eastern District of Texas to hold court in the city of Plano. That bill (S. 1720) was important to Judge Hannah, who always worked hard to serve the citizens of the Eastern District. He passed away the day after the President signed that legislation into law.

The death of Judge Hannah leaves some big shoes to fill, but President Bush could not have filled them better than with the nomination of Texas Supreme Court Justice Michael Haygood Schneider.

Justice Schneider will bring to the federal district court the wisdom, judgment, and experience of over a quarter century of service on the bench. He understands - as any good judge must - that the duty of a judge is to interpret the law, not legislate from the bench.

Justice Schneider has held virtually every position in the state court system that Texas has to offer. From 1978 to 1990, he served on the West University Place Municipal Court. Then, he served on the 157th District Court of Texas, located in Houston, until 1996. Next, he became Chief Justice of the First Court of Appeals in Houston. He served there until 2002, when he was appointed Justice of the Supreme Court of Texas, where I once served.

He has been honored as both "Trial Judge of the Year" and "Appellate Judge of the Year" by the Texas Association of Civil Trial and Appellate Specialists.

In addition to this extraordinary record of judicial service, Justice Schneider also served the people of Texas in the role of Assistant District Attorney for Harris County. Justice Schneider is a graduate of Stephen F. Austin State University, the University of Houston College of Law, and - more recently - the LL.M. program of the University of Virginia Law School. And he has a distinguished record of civic involvement.

Justice Schneider's reputation as an exceptional jurist and a true gentleman is well known throughout the state of Texas. It is also well known by the American Bar Association, which recently gave him its highest rating, when its Standing Committee on the Federal Judiciary unanimously certified him as "well qualified" for the federal bench. His nomination enjoys broad bipartisan support across the state of Texas. For example, Susan Hays, who chairs the Dallas County Democratic Party, has written a strong letter of support, and without objection, I'd like to submit that letter for the record.

I also happen to know that Justice Schneider is a humble man. His profile on the Texas Supreme Court's website points out that "[h]e held a variety of jobs during college and law school," including "searching titles at a major oil company, managing apartments, driving ambulances, operating a school bus for disabled children, working at a funeral home, teaching school, delivering milk, clerking for a law firm, managing a college cafeteria, serving as a waiter, bell hopping at a hotel, and serving as an intern at the United States Attorney's Office." I may ask him which of those jobs best prepared him to become a federal judge.

I am pleased that the President has nominated Justice Schneider to serve on the Eastern District of Texas, and I am honored to chair today's hearing. I look forward to hearing from him today, and I look forward to what I hope will be a swift confirmation process.