

Response of Sara Lee Ellis
Nominee to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of Illinois
to the Written Questions of Senator Amy Klobuchar

1. If you had to describe it, how would you characterize your judicial philosophy?

Response: My judicial philosophy is to adhere to the rule of law and apply the law in a fair and impartial manner to the facts presented to the court. Additionally, my judicial philosophy would call for treating all litigants with courtesy, respect, and an even hand. Finally, my judicial philosophy would call for resolving legal issues promptly, decisively, and after thorough application of the relevant legal principles to the facts at hand.

2. What assurances can you give that litigants coming into your courtroom will be treated fairly regardless of their political beliefs or whether they are rich or poor, defendant or plaintiff?

Response: Throughout my 19 year career, I have represented a variety of parties and litigants. I have represented criminal defendants and members of law enforcement, plaintiffs and defendants, corporations and individuals. I have been a zealous advocate for my clients regardless of their political beliefs, financial standing, or their role in the case as plaintiff or defendant. Though the role of a judge is different from the role of an advocate, what would not change is the respect and fairness with which I would approach every party. If I were fortunate enough to be confirmed, I assure this Committee that I would treat all parties who come before me fairly, impartially, and with respect.

3. In your opinion, how strongly should judges bind themselves to the doctrine of stare decisis? How does the commitment to stare decisis vary depending on the court?

Response: District court judges are bound, without exception, to the doctrine of *stare decisis*. In practice, this means that district court judges must follow the controlling precedent within their Circuit. Moreover, district court judges must adhere to controlling authority issued by the Supreme Court. While the Supreme Court or an *en banc* panel of a particular Circuit Court may overturn controlling legal precedent within that Circuit, district court judges do not have that authority. The doctrine of *stare decisis* is the basis on which our legal system operates in a just, fair and predictable manner.