

**Opening Statement of Senator Mark Begich
Nominations of D.C. Superior Court Judges
May 15, 2013**

This hearing will come to order. Good afternoon.

Today the Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee meets to consider the nominations of Robert D. Okun and Michael K. O’Keefe to be Associate Judges on the District of Columbia Superior Court. Welcome to both of you.

I’m also pleased that Congresswoman Norton is able to join us today to introduce these nominees. Thank you for being here, Congresswoman.

I would also like to extend a warm welcome to the families and friends of our nominees in attendance. Glad you could be here.

This committee consistently receives excellent candidates, nominated by the President, and recommended by the non-partisan District of Columbia Judicial Nomination Commission. This process is critical to ensuring we have candidates who are experienced, and have the appropriate temperament for this position.

It is no secret judges have critically important duties in our society. Judges must uphold and interpret the law, resolve disputes equitably, and protect the rights and liberties of our citizens. If confirmed, I trust each of you will fulfill these responsibilities with respect, character, and deference befitting this court.

As many of you already know, Mr. Okun currently serves as the Head of Special Proceedings in the United States Attorney’s Office for the District of Columbia. The Special Proceedings Division handles all post-conviction litigation in both U.S. District Court and Superior Court. Since 1987, Mr. Okun has worked for the Department of Justice both in the Civil Division and the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District.

Mr. O’Keefe is currently a solo practitioner with a practice that focuses mostly on criminal defense and family law. He has been a member of the District of Columbia Bar since 1994, handled more than 2,000 cases in Superior Court, and litigated over 200 trials. He serves on the panel of Criminal Justice Act lawyers who are appointed by the Court to represent indigent parties in criminal proceedings.

Mr. Okun, Mr. O’Keefe, I have reviewed your biographical questionnaires and believe you are both well qualified to serve as Associate Judges for the Superior Court of the District of Columbia.

While you pursued different career paths within the legal field that led you to this point, I know you both will bring extensive legal experience to the bench.

I look forward to your testimony and hearing more about your education, experience, and why you sought these positions.

Again, I want to thank both of you for your time today and your willingness to serve.