

Meet the Kirkland Partner in Line to Shepherd Trump's Judicial Nominees

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If President Donald Trump gets to fill another U.S. Supreme Court seat, he will have an experienced hand in Kirkland & Ellis partner Beth Williams guiding any nominee through confirmation.

Williams is **Trump's pick to head** the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Legal Policy, long the shepherd of judicial nominees. Given the possibility that Trump will have one or even two more high court vacancies to fill, Williams will be a key player in the nominees' success or failure. She is no stranger to that sometimes-controversial task, having worked for the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee to help guide John Roberts Jr. and Samuel Alito Jr. through confirmation.

The judiciary committee on Wednesday **considered her nomination**. Teamed with two judicial nominees and another Justice Department nominee, Williams faced few questions. The Harvard Law School graduate told the committee she was hoping to work on the department's violent crime task force and in the areas of child exploitation and human trafficking if she is confirmed.

When asked by committee chairman Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, what she would bring to the DOJ's legal policy office, she cited her work on his committee, her pro bono work and her management of litigation. "I've got very broad legal experience and a lot of experience analyzing legal issues," Williams, a Kirkland **partner since 2010**, told the committee.

Here are six things to know about the would-be assistant attorney general.

Williams and the DOJ's No. 3 official—Rachel Brand—worked on the same U.S. Supreme Court nominations. Brand, **now the associate attorney general** in the Sessions Justice Department, headed the Office of Legal Policy in the George W. Bush administration. Brand helped pave the paths to confirmation for Roberts and Alito. At the same time, Williams served as special counsel to the Senate Judiciary Committee as the committee worked on those two nominations.

At Kirkland, Williams has worked on securities and shareholder derivative actions, contract disputes and other matters for some big-name corporate clients. A partner in Kirkland's litigation, appellate, First Amendment, and securities and shareholder litigation practices, Williams is lead counsel to Facebook and its officers and directors in a shareholder class action in connection with Facebook's 2012 initial public offering. She is also counsel to

UBS Securities LLC against claims of unlawful naked short selling brought by holders of Escala Group Inc. stock.

Other clients include Questar, Chipotle, Accenture, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the board of directors of SAIC Inc. (now Leidos). Williams represented SAIC in a securities derivative suit that alleged misconduct in connection with SAIC's billing on a contract with New York City to develop and implement CityTime, an automated time, attendance, and workforce management system for certain city agencies.

"Ms. Williams is even-tempered, unflappable, and has excellent judgment. In our line of work, we handle high-stakes litigation and stressful situations frequently. Ms. Williams is invariably thoughtful and composed: she is exactly the type of person you want at the Department of Justice," a group of Kirkland lawyers **wrote to the judiciary committee**.

The Williams household has more than one Big Law occupant. Williams **is married to** John Williams, a litigation and appellate partner at Williams & Connolly. She promised in her **ethics disclosure statement** to avoid acting on any matters that involve her firm and her husband's firm, if she is confirmed. She also intends to resign her Kirkland partnership, which earned her a salary and bonus of \$401,425, **according to her financial disclosure statement**.

Remember the firing of U.S. Agriculture Department official Shirley Sherrod over a video selectively edited and posted by Andrew Breitbart claiming she was racist? Williams was on the Kirkland team that represented Sherrod in her defamation lawsuit against Breitbart in Washington's federal trial court. Sherrod was forced to resign because of the video. When the full video was revealed, she received an apology from the White House. Sherrod **settled the lawsuit** in 2015.

Williams has been active in pro bono and Supreme Court litigation. Her pro bono work included a Second Circuit **appointment to represent** Patrick Proctor, a New York state inmate who had been held in solitary confinement for 18 years. Williams won a decision in 2013 from a three-judge panel, allowing Proctor to go forward with a challenge to his confinement. In the Supreme Court, she helped with the crafting of six briefs at the certiorari and merits stages, including in **Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner & Smith v. Manning** in 2015. She was on the Kirkland team **that filed an amicus brief**, for the Cato Institute, in the D.C. murder case *Turner v. United States* that the justices heard this term.

A member of the Federalist Society, Williams volunteered legal services for two presidential campaigns. Williams **was president** of the Federalist Society at Harvard Law and maintains her membership in the national society today. After law school, she worked on the volunteer legal teams for McCain for President in 2008 and Gov. Mitt Romney's presidential campaign in 2012.

All four nominees before the Judiciary Committee on Wednesday are Federalist Society members, triggering a mini-dust up between two senators. Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Illinois, asked them why they joined the society and whether they thought it helped to advance their careers.

Williams did not get a chance to answer. When another nominee called the society a "debating society," Durbin rejoined, "A debating society? They all say that. I love it. The Federalist Society claims it has ideological ownership of nominees, that they are so proud they are the clearinghouse for nominees." He cited the society's support from the Koch brothers and the Chamber of Commerce, among others.

Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, took up the defense. "One would think this was some clandestine organization the way some people describe it," he said. A member his entire adult life, he added, "One of the things I've loved about the Federalist Society is that it goes way out of its way to get people from a pretty wide ideological spectrum and that in turn makes for better debate and discussion, which is good for the educational system and the practice of law."

When Sen. Thom Tillis, R-North Carolina, asked Williams if the Federalist Society ever required her to get a tattoo or make some kind of pledge to a particular position, she replied: "Never."