

Justices defend clerk hiring record, want improvement

WASHINGTON (AP)— Two Supreme Court justices last week defended the court's record of hiring women and minorities as law clerks but added there's room for improvement.

"I must stand in defense of my colleagues," Justice Clarence Thomas, the second black to serve on the nation's highest court, told a House Appropriations subcommittee. "I do believe that they would love to see more minorities at the Supreme Court in every capacity."

Justice David H. Souter predicted new pressure at law schools to see that more high-

achieving minorities and women are among those recommended for clerkships.

"I think we are going to see the fruits of some pushing," he added.

Thomas and Souter appeared before the House Appropriations subcommittee on commerce, justice, state and the judiciary to outline the high court's budget request for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1.

The court also is requesting new money for the current year to hire 36 new police officers to staff 13 additional guard posts. Souter said the request was "in response to last summer's

events," apparently referring to the shootings inside the Capitol last July, when two police officers were killed.

The Supreme Court has been accused in recent months by the NAACP and others of hiring too few minorities and women as law clerks.

Clerks help the justices screen new cases, do research and draft opinions.

Rep. Jose Serrano, D-N.Y., asked, "Do you see anything wrong with it and is there any way we can begin to approach it?"

Souter and Thomas said the justices rely on recommendations from law

schools and from lower federal courts, where most young lawyers serve as clerks before being hired at the Supreme Court.

Rep. Julian Dixon, D-Calif., suggested the justices may be relying too heavily on a limited number of law schools, such as those at Harvard, Yale, Stanford and the University of Chicago.

He added that Justice Sandra Day O'Connor had hired more female clerks than her colleagues, saying she "must have reached out. ... She was looking for women."

Thomas said he likes to hire clerks from "modest backgrounds" and those who

perform against the odds.

"When I was in law school I knew nothing about clerkships," he said.

"I didn't know how they were gotten."

"There's work that can be done at every level," Thomas said, adding that as the composition of the candidates for clerkships changes, "so will our hiring rate."

Souter outlined a proposed \$35.9 million operating budget request for the Supreme Court for fiscal 2000, an increase of 12 percent.

In addition, the architect of the Capitol is seeking \$22.6 million for upkeep of the court

building, a sharp increase over last year's \$5.4 million. That includes funds to plan a major renovation of the building that could cost up to \$120 million.

Subcommittee Chairman Harold Rogers, R-Ky., expressed surprise at the figure, saying last year's estimate was \$20 million.

Souter said the figure appeared to be a high-range estimate, adding that one reason may be the need to address "structural security issues."

The proposal includes funds for installation of bullet-resistant glass as a demonstration project.

Legislature

(Continued from Page 3) second offense, the fine will be increased to \$50.

Legislation could create minority health division

Senate Bill 4 sponsored by the Senate Committee on Human Resources would create the division of minority health within the Department

of Human Resources and create an advisory committee to the division of minority health.

The current divisions of the department of human resources include the aging services division, the health division, the mental hygiene and mental retardation

division, the welfare division, and the division of child and family services.

The division of minority health's purpose would be to improve the quality of health care services for minorities, increase access to health care services for minorities, and educate the public on

minority health concerns.

If SB4 passes, the division of minority health will provide a central source of information for minority health concerns, in addition to advocating on behalf of minority groups for the improvement of health care services.

The division will also be responsible for holding conferences, providing training, and addressing cultural diversity in the public and private sector that offer services in the health care field. The incorporation of the division of minority health within the department of

human resources will increase the opportunity for training and recruitment of minorities in the field of health care.

Senate Committee on Human Resources' Chairman Raymond Rawson, who introduced the bill, could not be reached for comment.

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