

Steve Susman Speaks to a Group of Local Attorneys About Restoring a Fully Functioning Judiciary

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On September 11, 2012, Steve Susman spoke to a group of local attorneys about retoring a fully functioning judiciary. The courts cannot function without judges; yet nationwide we face an unprecedented federal judicial vacancy crisis, and nowhere more acutely felt than here in Texas. The state has two circuit court, four district court, and two future district vacancies on the federal bench, a vacancy rate of 10% that mirrors the national rate. The caseload has become so high that the majority of these vacancies are classified as judicial emergencies by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts.

When scheduling a trial in the Planned Parenthood suit, District Judge Lee Yeakel told the litigants if they wanted an earlier trial date they should “contact your senators and get us some help” on the bench.

Taking up Judge Yeakel’s call to action, Steve Susman, a partner with Susman Godfrey and member of the board of directors of the American Constitution Society (ACS) and co-chair of its Judicial Nominations Task Force, spoke to a group of local attorneys today about what they can do to restore a fully functioning judiciary. “No matter the issue – access to justice, health care, immigration, employment discrimination, privacy – the courts play an increasingly important role in everyone’s lives,” said Susman. “Regardless of where you live or what issues you care about, all Texans deserve a judicial system that works. Senators of both parties need to do more to help the 17 non-controversial and qualified nominees for the trial court bench, already approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee, get an up or down vote this year. During President George W. Bush’s last few months in office, a similar number of trial court nominees was confirmed en masse. Texans are paying the price for the delay.”

Senators Cornyn and Hutchison established a joint bipartisan Federal Judicial Evaluation Committee to review applications, interview candidates, and make recommendations to the senators on who is best qualified to fill these vacancies. Susman, a Democrat, and his partner Charles Eskridge, a Republican who also spoke at today’s meeting, are both members of this Committee.