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DURBIN: WHITE HOUSE NOMINATES TWO TO FILL FEDERAL JUDICIAL VACANCIES IN NORTHERN DISTRICT

[WASHINGTON, D.C.] – U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) today announced that President Obama has nominated two Illinoisans to fill vacancies on the U.S. District Court in the Northern District of Illinois.

The first, Jorge Alonso, was recommended by Durbin after he conducted extensive interviews with the finalists chosen by a bipartisan screening committee. The second, John Blakey, was submitted by U.S. Senator Mark Kirk (R-IL) under a long-standing Illinois tradition that allows the highest ranking member from the opposite party one recommendation for every three made by the senior senator.

“Judge Alonso is an excellent candidate for a federal judgeship in Illinois. He is a dedicated public servant with a wealth of courtroom and judicial experience,” said Durbin. “Without bipartisan effort in the Senate, it is very difficult to secure the confirmation of even the best qualified judicial nominees, so I thank Senator Kirk for working with me to carry on Illinois’ tradition of bipartisanship when it comes to judicial nominations.”

Judge Alonso has served as an Associate Judge of the Circuit Court of Cook County since 2003. He currently serves in the Criminal Division and also presides over a specialty court program for women with mental illness in the criminal justice system. He previously worked for over eleven years as an Assistant Public Defender in the Office of the Cook County Public Defender. He is a graduate of the George Washington University Law School. Judge Alonso lives in Park Ridge.

Durbin, who was first elected to the Senate in 1996, is the senior senator from Illinois. The senior senator from the President’s political party has traditionally had the lead role in making

recommendations to the President for the positions of Federal District Court Judge, U.S. Attorney, and U.S. Marshal in the senator's home state.

During the Clinton Presidency, Durbin worked closely with Senator Peter Fitzgerald to ensure that highly qualified candidates for federal judgeships were nominated by the President with bipartisan support in order to secure their confirmation. Before making recommendations to President Obama, Durbin consulted with the office of Senator Kirk.

In order to make recommendations for current and future judicial vacancies in the Northern District, Durbin established a screening committee in August 2012 comprised of 13 distinguished Illinoisans drawn from various aspects of the legal profession including former judges, prominent litigators, bar association leaders, and former prosecutors and defenders. The committee was co-chaired by Dick Devine, former Cook County State's Attorney and current partner at the law firm of Meckler Bulger Tilson Marick & Pearson LLP, and Patricia Brown Holmes, former Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois and a partner at the law firm of Schiff Hardin.

The screening committees reviewed applications, interviewed applicants and references, and recommended the names of several individuals to Durbin. Durbin reviewed the screening committees' recommendations, conducted interviews of the finalists, and submitted his recommendations to the President, who makes the final decisions on nominees.

Once the President submits a nomination to the U.S. Senate, the nominee will be reviewed by the Senate Judiciary Committee, of which Senator Durbin is a member, and will ultimately receive a vote in the committee. If a nomination is approved by the Judiciary Committee, the nominee will receive a vote by the full Senate.