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Obama taps two alumnae for high-profile positions



Virginia Seitz '85



Denise E. O'Donnell '82

Seitz '85 and O'Donnell '82 share a hearing date before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary

Two University at Buffalo alumnae, Virginia A. Seitz '85 and Denise E. O'Donnell '82, have secured high-profile and highly sensitive legal positions in the Obama administration.

Both women were nominated for the positions by President Obama: Seitz as assistant attorney general heading the Office of Legal Counsel in the Department of Justice and O'Donnell as head of the Justice Department's Bureau of Legal Assistance. They appeared for questioning at a hearing before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary on March 30.

After questioning from judiciary committee members, their nominations were scheduled for committee consideration during an executive business meeting. As *UB Law Forum* went to press, the full Senate voted to confirm the nominations.

Both women were cited by Obama for their "extraordinary dedication."

Virginia Seitz

Seitz was nominated by the president as assistant attorney general, where she will head the Office of Legal Counsel in the Department of Justice. Seitz, who was first in her class at UB Law and the recipient of the Max Koren award, said that during law school "I was prodded to not just think in a tiny box, but connect all coursework with what I was doing in other areas."

Since 1998 she has worked in the Washington, D.C., office of the law firm Sidley Austin LLP. There she has done appellate litigation work, and she is best-known for authoring an amicus brief on behalf of retired military offi-

cers in support of affirmative action in the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *Grutter v. Bollinger*.

The office of legal counsel provides legal advice to the president and executive-branch agencies on constitutional and other major issues. It employs about two dozen lawyers. The office has not had a Senate-confirmed head since 2004 and has been a flashpoint of political division in recent years.

Seitz is a former clerk for Judge Harry Edwards of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, and for U.S. Supreme Court Justice William Brennan. She has worked on more than 100 Supreme Court briefs and petitions for

certiorari, and hundreds of filings in lower courts. Her bachelor's degree, summa cum laude, is from Duke University, and she was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University.

Denise O'Donnell

O'Donnell was nominated by President Obama to head the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau, part of the Department's Office of Justice Programs, gives grants to state and local criminal justice agencies and other entities across the criminal justice field, including law enforcement, courts, corrections, treatment, victim services, technology, and prevention initiatives that strengthen the nation's criminal justice system.

O'Donnell recently served as New York State Deputy Secretary for Public Safety, where she oversaw 11 homeland security and criminal justice agencies with a combined annual budget of \$4.7 billion. From 2007 to 2010, she served as Commissioner of the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, where she managed several crime reduction efforts, including the collection and analysis of crime data, criminal background investigations, juvenile justice, and the administration of state and federal criminal justice grants.

Prior to her appointment, O'Donnell was a litigation partner at Hodgson Russ, LLP. During the Clinton administration, she was appointed as United States Attorney for the Western District of New York (1997-2001). She joined the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District in 1985 as a prosecutor and was later promoted to first assistant U.S. Attorney in 1993. Earlier in her career, she served as a law clerk to the late Justice M. Dolores Denman of the New York Appellate Division, Fourth Department.

She holds a B.S. from Canisius College and an M.S.W and J.D., summa cum laude, from the University at Buffalo.