

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin

Volume 158, No. 41

Senate judiciary panel sees changes

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SPRINGFIELD — Arthur J. Wilhelm's departure from the Illinois Senate last week led to a pair of changes on the Senate Judiciary Committee.

State Sen. Ira I. Silverstein, a Chicago Democrat and owner of the Law Office of Ira I. Silverstein, on Tuesday took over for Wilhelm as the committee's chairman.

State Sen. Toi W. Hutchinson, a Democrat from Olympia Fields, fills the open spot on the committee.

Silverstein, a member of the committee since taking office in 1999, said he hopes to maintain the largely nonpartisan environment that characterizes the committee.

After receiving the appointment, Silverstein said he reached out to committee members of both parties and their staffs to emphasize his desire to continue friendly working relationships.

"Believe it or not, some lawyers do get along," Silverstein said. "I think we're going to keep the same tone."

Wilhelm, a Joliet Democrat in office since 2005, left the Senate and his role as a partner at Murer, Brick & Wilhelm in Joliet on Friday. He began work Monday as senior vice president of government relations for the Illinois Hospital Association.

Party officials appointed Braidwood City Clerk Pat McGuire to fill Wilhelm's seat.

Silverstein said his 25 years of experience as a general practitioner will guide his running of the committee.

"I bring a working knowledge, because I have my own practice," said Silverstein, who is married and has four children. "I deal with all aspects of the law."

State Sen. John G. Mulroe, a Chicago Democrat and owner of John G. Mulroe P.C., serves as committee vice chairman. He said Silverstein frequently provides insight to the group on certain areas of the law that other members may not be familiar with.

"He's got a lot of experience in the divorce or dissolution of marriage issues that many probably don't have on Judiciary," Mulroe said. "Every time that issue comes up, he offers a lot of knowledge that I don't have."

Thomas M. Suffredin, a lawyer-lobbyist for The Chicago Bar Association, said Silverstein tends to maintain high expectations for people testifying at committee hearings and often prepares a string of questions to ask.

"He does a deep dive on stuff," Suffredin said. "He's engaged. You don't get by with a short summary of something. He wants to know what's going on and the history of all sorts of things when you



Toi W. Hutchinson



Ira I. Silverstein

talk to him."

Suffredin said Wilhelm ran the Judiciary Committee in a similar fashion, so he doesn't see meetings changing much with a new chairman.

"I would expect it to be a similar type of operation," he said. "Other than personality differences that they have, I don't think there will be any differences in the way they run the committee or the expectations they have for people presenting."

Hutchinson, meanwhile, said she wanted the appointment since no women currently serve on the committee and no other female senators possess legal training.

"I'm excited to be a part of a committee that plays such an integral role in lawmaking," Hutchinson said.

Hutchinson took a leave of absence from the Northern Illinois University College of Law when appointed to her seat in January 2009.

She recently resumed studies at NIU, she said, taking six credit hours this semester and more classes throughout the summer. Soon, she will get 3L status, she said.

"The things that inspire me to the legislature also inspire me to the study of law," she said. "You're supposed to be a voice for those that don't have one."