



## Congressman José E. Serrano

Chairman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government

**For Immediate Release:** April 23, 2009

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### **Opening Statement of Chairman José E. Serrano Financial Services and General Government Subcommittee Hearing on the Supreme Court Budget Request for FY 2010 April 23, 2009**

Our subject today is the Supreme Court and its appropriations request for the upcoming fiscal year. We'll be hearing from two distinguished Justices of that Court.

These annual hearings are a rare opportunity for our two branches of government to interact. Congress, of course, has constitutional responsibility over Federal spending, including appropriations for the Supreme Court and the rest of the Judiciary. Although I always have some concern about asking the Third Branch to come and testify before us about buildings, staffing levels and computers, these hearings provide an important opportunity for the nation's highest Court to bring to light issues affecting the Judiciary, as well as to help us understand their budgetary needs. If in the process our two branches get to know one another a little better, that's an added bonus.

Meeting the needs of the Judicial Branch is a priority for this subcommittee. The courts have a vital role to play in a society like ours where the rule of law is a core principle. We need to be sure that the courts have the resources they need to dispense justice with reasonable speed and care, and with proper regard for the rights of defendants and litigants and the needs of society.

At the same time we also have a responsibility to exercise due diligence in spending matters, and to balance competing needs. While appropriations for the courts are small relative to the total Federal budget, the Judicial Branch does account for more than a quarter of our modest-sized Financial Services and General Government appropriations bill. In some years, the percentage increases involved are substantial. Having said that, I should also add that we recognize and appreciate recent efforts by the Judiciary, including the Supreme Court, to exercise budgetary restraint and find ways of holding down costs.

We look forward today to a discussion of the budget needs of the Supreme Court. Our witnesses are Justice Clarence Thomas and Justice Stephen Breyer.

Justice Thomas was nominated to the Court in 1991 by the first President Bush, after serving as Assistant Secretary of Education for Civil Rights, Chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and as a judge on the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, among other positions.

Justice Breyer joined the Court in 1994 as a nominee of President Clinton. The many positions he held prior to that time include professor at Harvard Law School, staff member for the Senate Judiciary Committee, and judge and then chief judge on the Court of Appeals for the First Circuit.

Justice Thomas has been a witness at these hearings for a number of years now, while this is Justice Breyer's first visit to our subcommittee. Welcome to both of you, and thank you for joining us today.

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*Congressman José E. Serrano has represented the Bronx in Congress since 1990.  
He is the Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Financial  
Services and General Government.*