

# The Associated Press

---

August 01, 2002

---

## Senate Panel Quizzes Hatch Staffer

WASHINGTON -- Senate Democrats on Thursday quizzed one of GOP Sen. Orrin Hatch's staffers who wants a seat on the U.S. Court of Federal Claims after environment groups raised concerns about his past writings.

Lawrence Block has worked as senior Republican lawyer for the Senate Judiciary Committee since 1994 and is well known by committee Democrats. Still, "this is a serious nomination that deserves serious scrutiny," Senate Judiciary Chairman Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., said.

Environment groups have complained that Block, while working for Hatch, advocated legislation that they said would "redefine takings in a manner that would threaten a wide range of safety, health, environmental, civil rights, and other protections."

"An ultraconservative interpretation of the Takings Clause could be extremely damaging, redefining property rights at the expense of neighboring property, public health, and the environment," according to a release from Earthjustice, an environmental advocacy group.

But Block said he would not use any proposed legislation to make decisions, because those proposals never became law. His job as a staffer was to work to get Hatch's proposals passed, something he understands that "is far different than being a judge," he said.

Hatch, the committee's ranking Republican, said Block shouldn't be punished for advocating Hatch's positions while working for him.

"Larry's demonstrated ability to advocate on my behalf indicates to me that he will be exactly the type of judge we want to see confirmed: one who is able to follow the law regardless of his personal views," said Hatch, R-Utah.