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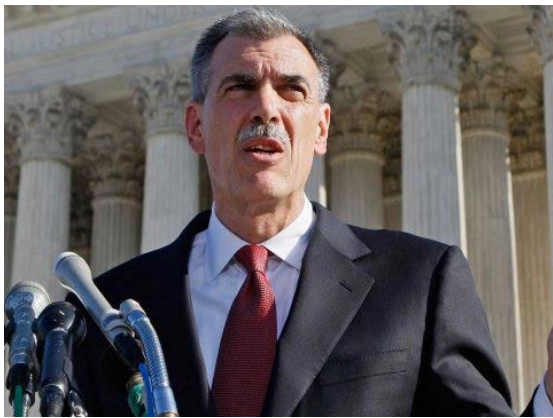
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Professor Jared Goldstein's Post

A Fireside Chat with Solicitor General Donald Verrilli, Jr.

Posted by Jared Goldstein on 01/26/2015 at 12:00 AM



On Wednesday, February 4, 2015, I'll be interviewing **Donald Verrilli, Jr., the Solicitor General of the United States**, in an event that's been billed as a "[Fireside Chat](#)." Those looking to find warmth in these winter months may be disappointed that there will be no actual fire, only a lot of chat. Since I have no experience doing public interviewing, I'm guessing that I was chosen because in 1996, in my first real job as a lawyer, I had the good fortune to work as a Bristow Fellow in the Solicitor General's Office.

The Solicitor General is responsible for all litigation on behalf of the United States government in the United States Supreme Court. The Solicitor General decides which cases the government asks the Supreme Court to review, decides the positions the government takes before the Court, and conducts oral argument in the most high-profile cases in the country's highest court. Although the Solicitor General is appointed by the President and in some ways functions as an ordinary lawyer representing a client, the Solicitor General's client is the United States itself, an unusual kind of client. Longstanding tradition dictates that the Solicitor General's first duty is to represent the interests of the United States, not the narrow interests of the President and his political party.

In January 2011, President Obama nominated Donald Verrilli as Solicitor General to succeed Elena Kagan, who was appointed to the United States Supreme Court. In the three and a half years that Verrilli has served as Solicitor General, he has argued many cases that will have long-lasting impact. During his first year as Solicitor General, Verrilli defended the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act, in one of the most important cases to reach the Supreme Court in our generation. Many media commentators panned his performance, saying that Verrilli personally would be responsible for the government's defeat.

Three months later, Verrilli got the last laugh when the Court announced that it agreed with Verrilli and upheld the law.

In addition to the health care case, Verrilli's record as Solicitor General includes the following wins and losses:

- Verrilli argued (and lost) *Shelby County v. Holder*, in which the Supreme Court struck down a key section of the Voting Rights Act.
- Verrilli argued (and won) *U.S. v. Windsor*, which struck down the Defense of Marriage Act.
- Verrilli argued (and lost) *Sebelius v. Hobby Lobby*, the contraceptives mandate case, which held that for-profit corporations can assert claims of religious freedom and can obtain exemptions from federal law requiring that employers provide employees health insurance coverage for contraceptives.

Several of the cases Verrilli is arguing this year are likely to be equally weighty. In March, Verrilli will represent the United States in *King v. Burwell*, another case that threatens to unravel the Affordable Care Act by challenging the validity of federal subsidies offered under Act Obamacare. The next month, he will represent the United States in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, in which the Supreme Court will decide the constitutionality of state bans on same-sex marriage.

In our [Fireside Chat](#), I will ask Verrilli about the role of the Solicitor General, the importance of oral argument, the many important cases in which he's been involved, and what it's like to argue in the Supreme Court. Even if there's no actual fire, the chat should shed light on the lawyer's role in shaping the development of the law.