

Father Brooks.

STATEMENT OF FATHER JOHN E. BROOKS

Father BROOKS. Mr. Chairman, I am the Reverend John E. Brooks of the Society of Jesus, president of the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, MA.

It is both an honor and a pleasure for me to appear before you on behalf of Judge Clarence Thomas and to participate in the process which I hope will conclude with the seating of Judge Thomas as an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court. I have known Judge Thomas for almost a quarter century, so I believe I can speak about him with some authority.

I first came to know Judge Thomas when he was a student at the College of the Holy Cross from 1968 to 1971. When he entered the college, I was vice president and academic dean. Appointed president of the college in 1970, Judge Thomas' graduating class in 1971 was the first over which I presided as president.

In preparation for this meeting today, I came across a memorandum which I had written on April 21, 1970, to the Reverend Raymond J. Swords of the Society of Jesus, my immediate predecessor in the presidency of the college, in which memorandum I had recommended that he appoint Clarence Thomas to membership in Alpha Sigma Nu, the national Jesuit College Honor Society. The reasons I gave them may be of interest today. Allow me to quote from that memo.

May I recommend that you consider nominating Clarence Thomas, class of 1971, to membership in Alpha Sigma Nu. Clarence has a cumulative quality point index of 3.577 and ranks very high in his class. He is a member of the Purple Key, the Black Student Union, and is genuinely respected by his fellow students.

The good judgment, integrity, and serious concern for the college which I had observed in Clarence Thomas as a student, and then his educational record and experience which I had followed closely during the years following his graduation from Holy Cross, led me to seek his appointment to the board of trustees of the college in 1978. He served two 4-year terms from 1978 through 1986, and he was reelected to the board in 1987, and continues to serve at the present time.

Judge Thomas is an active member of our board, concerned about all those things board members ought to take seriously: Educational quality, finances, student and faculty productivity and the like. However, I would like to limit my remarks to characteristics I have observed in him which I suspect have some bearing upon his fitness to serve on our highest Court. They are his energetic concern for the education of all our young people, especially for those of minority backgrounds, and his very practical approach to obtaining it for them. Judge Thomas is a realist. He knows the essential part which a good solid education has played in his own rise from abject privation to prominence, and he knows that it is the key which will unlock the same doors for others. Judge Thomas has been an active recruiter of minority students for Holy Cross, making the college known to them, assisting them in the application process, and making sure that, once enrolled, they do not drop out.

I find it difficult to recall a single meeting of the board of trustees during which Judge Thomas did not question the administrators of the college, including the president, about the status of minority recruitment—how many African-American students did we enroll; how many had applied; from which high schools; with what SAT scores; about the status of financial aid for minority students; about the relative rank in class of minority students; about the social climate for minority students; about the graduation record of minority students. With a willing acknowledgment that minority students might need and be given some special and supplementary counseling, Judge Thomas insisted always that every student be held to the same standards of excellence and that each one be given the opportunity and effective encouragement to attain excellence.

As a trustee, Judge Thomas met frequently with African-American students at Holy Cross. On occasions of his visits to the college, he scheduled meetings with our Black Student Union so that he might have a firsthand, personal knowledge of those students with a background like his own. Over the years, he became a kind of role model for our African-American students, and in speaking with them, he was never stingy with either advice, know-how, or making the right connections for them. His message was never an easy one, but it was real and it was practical: Work hard, make the best of every opportunity, and know that we are there to help in every way we can.

Judge Thomas is a practical man. He is well aware that the board, room, and tuition costs at a private, 4-year, liberal arts college like Holy Cross are far and beyond the financial resources of almost all minority applicants. He has been constant in his support for our Martin Luther King, Jr., scholarship program for African-American students which makes possible for others the same brand of opportunity which was made possible for him.

Over the past few months, you have heard and read a great deal about Judge Clarence Thomas. My personal knowledge of him convinces me that he is a man of compassion, good judgment, and intelligence. His zeal for justice, freedom, and equal opportunity for all Americans is well-known to us at Holy Cross. Our highest Court will be greatly honored and enriched by his service.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Prepared statement follows.]