

Governor Appoints FSU Professor to Bench During Judicial Law Lesson

by Jill Elish

Gov. Charlie Crist brought a lesson on the judicial appointment process to life when he made a surprise visit to a Florida State University law classroom recently to appoint a professor to an appellate judgeship. L. Clayton "Clay" Roberts and FSU President Emeritus Talbot "Sandy" D'Alemberte, who co-teach a class on state constitutional law, were leading a discussion on judicial appointments when Crist and Lt. Gov. Jeff Kottkamp showed up to announce their administration's first judicial appointment - Roberts. Roberts will succeed retired Judge Richard Ervin III on the 1st District Court of Appeal.

"It was wonderful that it happened in the law school that I went to and where I now teach," said Roberts, a 1998 graduate of the FSU College of Law and an adjunct professor. Roberts, 41, said he was stunned to see the classroom door open and his wife, Trelles, walk in with Crist, Kottkamp and other members of Crist's team. "He said, 'Hi, I'm Gov. Crist, and I'm here to make your professor a judge.' " Crist apparently had first gone to Roberts' office in the Capitol, where Roberts serves as executive deputy attorney general, but quickly decided to head to the law school to deliver the news upon learning that Roberts was teaching.

"Our students were really thrilled," D'Alemberte said. "That Gov. Crist would take his time to tell Clay in person is a great tribute to Clay and shows that the governor and Lt. Gov. Kottkamp are really comfortable here at FSU and that they really care about people. It also sends a signal that Crist cares a lot about judicial appointments, and not all governors do. He will pay attention to who he appoints to the judiciary." Richard Alton, a third-year FSU law student, said the surprise appearance could not have been more on point given the day's discussion of Article 5 of the Florida Constitution.



L. CLAYTON 'CLAY' ROBERTS

"The governor called him Judge Roberts and handed him a piece of paper," Alton said. "We all just started clapping. This is one of the great things about going to law school at FSU - we have so much access to the government and the judicial branch. We have four courts within a three-block radius of the law school." The judicial appointment may be the first for Crist, who took office on Jan. 2, but he did not have to look far to fill the appellate vacancy. As executive deputy attorney general, Roberts served under Crist, who was attorney general until he became governor. And like Roberts, both Crist and Kottkamp are FSU alumni. Roberts earned his FSU law degree after graduating from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y. Before serving as executive deputy attorney general, Roberts was general counsel to the Florida Department of State and director of the state Division of Elections.

"I'm excited to be able to continue my public service and will work hard to uphold the confidence of the governor and my friends who have supported me," Roberts said.