

Ginsburg hitting full stride in new position

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Judging by her energetic questioning from the bench, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg is quickly hitting full stride in her new job.

Intensive questioning last week by Ginsburg in a sexual-harassment case caused one lawyer to abandon his contention that the woman who had filed suit must prove the conduct harmed her performance at work.

"She basically pushed him to concede the case," said Georgetown University law professor Susan Deller Ross.

During her first two weeks of high court arguments, Ginsburg has asked lawyers frequent and probing questions on other issues such as drug forfeitures and civil rights law.

She also has brought the perspective of a former women's rights advocate to the conservative court, said some observers who noted that Ginsburg at one point described the "old days" of sexist law professors.

"She has hit the ground running," said Stuart M. Gerson, former acting attorney general in the Bush administration. "She has shown a great deal of energy and preparedness. Being on the court is awe-inspiring, but she is not awe-struck."

New justices often hold back when just arriving on the bench.

Justice David H. Souter waited three weeks to ask his first question in 1990. Now a frequent and incisive questioner, Souter admits finding the job overwhelming at first.

Ginsburg's performance is being likened to the equally fast start in 1986 by Justice Antonin Scalia, her former federal appeals court colleague.

"It's not just that she's asking lots of questions. It's that she's asking outstanding questions that get to the heart of the matter," said Georgetown University law professor Susan Low Bloch.

In the sex-harassment case, the lawyer representing the woman, who filed the lawsuit against a Tennessee company, didn't escape close questioning either. Ginsburg suggested he was making the case more complicated than it should be.

If a woman is told "you think like a woman" and a male co-worker is not subjected to similar comments, "doesn't that make their job more difficult?" Ginsburg asked.

"Do you need anything further than that? The terms and conditions (of a job) aren't equal if one is called names and the other isn't," she said.

Ginsburg suggested an equally straightforward view during arguments on a civil rights case, pointing out that whatever penalties are required, the law has been clear since 1964: "Thou shalt not discriminate."

In another argument, she said a drug-forfeiture law's basic message also is clear: "That's part of the penalty; you forfeit the home where the drugs were kept."

Ginsburg's vigorous performance comes as no surprise to lawyers who argued before her on the federal appeals court.

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Reading

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The program has another goal in addition to instilling a love for the learning process: It tries to make children more comfortable with themselves and the differences in races and cultures.

Mabel Sequiera, a doctoral student in the Department of Education and coordinator of the program, said the program helps young children get used to the differences they will see in other cultures.

The children learn about cultures through normal curiosity and questioning, Sequiera said. She told a story about asking the group what was different about her compared to many of the children.

Sequiera, who is from India, said the children pointed out her accent, and then began to question her about India: What food do people there eat? How do

they dress?

However, the families are not the only ones getting something out of this program.

"Even for me, it's different," she said, referring to the different cultures represented by the children in the program, "even though I'm from a different culture altogether."

"This should be a real growth experience for me," said Shelley Bolen, one of the tutors.

Bolen said students are not the only ones who benefit from the program.

"The program not only gives experience in teaching but also exposes the tutors to cultural and economic differences in our students," she said.

"The great thing about this program is that it accomplishes many things at once. The parents are studying, the tutors are learning, and the children are not only being stimulated, but are also in a safe, supervised situation."

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