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Schumer Backs Bush Choice for U.S. Attorney

By BENJAMIN WEISER

Senator Charles E. Schumer offered a strong endorsement yesterday of the federal prosecutor from Richmond, Va., who is President Bush's likely choice for the post of United States attorney for the Southern District of New York.

The senator's support for the nominee, James B. Comey, a Republican with a strong reputation for prosecuting gun violence, was seen as crucial, in part because of a struggle between the senator and Gov. George E. Pataki for influence in the president's judicial and prosecutorial appointments.

Senator Schumer also sits on the Senate Judiciary Committee, which must approve the nomination. And he is chairman of its courts subcommittee, a role that allows him to speed up or slow down nominations of federal judges and prosecutors.

"I don't think this was a Republican or Democratic appointment," Senator Schumer said by phone after his meeting. "It was a professional and classy appointment."

Senator Schumer said that after meeting with Mr. Comey, 40, he called the White House counsel, Alberto R. Gonzales, to offer his full support. The senator said that President Bush called him back and thanked him.

Senator Schumer described Mr. Comey's views as "thoughtful and moderate." He cited Mr. Comey's role in fighting terrorism and in Project Exile, a program to aggressively prosecute felons with guns in Richmond. "He's done a great job on preventing guns from getting into the wrong hands in Richmond," the senator said.

Mr. Comey, would succeed Mary Jo White, who has served as United States attorney for the Southern District since 1993. Earlier this fall, Attorney General John Ashcroft removed the authority from Ms. White's office to control decisions over prosecutions stemming from the Sept. 11 attacks.

Senator Schumer said the appointment of Mr. Comey would suggest to him that the Justice Department intended to give the Manhattan United States attorney's office a major role in terrorism prosecutions.

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