

Spotlight on the Bench: The Honorable Shad Robinson

By: Jacob King

In February of 2023, the Fifth Circuit appointed Judge Shad Robinson to serve as a U.S. Bankruptcy Judge for the Western District of Texas, Austin and Midland Divisions. This article will discuss Judge Robinson's background, career, and ultimately his pathway to becoming a bankruptcy Judge.



Education and Background

Judge Robinson grew up in Sioux City, Iowa where he developed a love for playing baseball and watching Iowa Hawkeyes football. After high school, he first attended Waldorf College and then Buena Vista University where he studied religion, philosophy, and criminal justice during the week and also played baseball for both schools. In 1996, Judge Robinson finished his undergraduate studies and then moved to Waco, Texas in 1997 to attend Baylor Law School.

Judge Robinson had an eventful law school experience. He went to law school

with the goal of working for the FBI but changed his focus to bankruptcy law after working as a volunteer clerk for a bankruptcy Judge in Iowa. Around that same time, Judge Robinson got married and started a family, as his studies continued to trend toward a career in bankruptcy law. Judge Robinson took bankruptcy and secured transactions and even completed an independent study on executory contracts to round out his legal education. Judge Robinson liked the academic side of bankruptcy and the unique challenges presented by restructuring the creditor debtor relationship.

Judge Clark Clerkship

After graduating from Baylor Law in 1999, Judge Robinson moved to San Antonio to clerk for Judge Leif M. Clark. During his clerkship, Judge Robinson prepared bench memos, observed bankruptcy court proceedings, researched many interesting issues, and assisted Judge Clark in writing numerous opinions. Judge Clark often challenged him on his memos and Judge Robinson enjoyed their discussions on the bankruptcy code.

Judge Robinson also liked how Judge Clark fostered a team focused environment in chambers. Judge Robinson recalls that Judge Clark always expressed his appreciation to the clerk's staff and treated everyone within his chambers with respect. Judge Clark handled matters in his court efficiently and generally had a good temperament even during hotly contested hearings. Judge Robinson also observed that Judge Clark took time out of his busy schedule to actively participate in the development of bankruptcy law and young bankruptcy lawyers by taking time to teach and speak at seminars.

Judge Robinson's clerkship with Judge Clark had a large impact on the way Judge Robinson conducted his private practice. Judge Robinson has also taken the lessons he learned with Judge Clark to the bench. Judge Robinson is very conscious of his term clerks and clerk staff and gives his best effort daily to make the Austin division a positive working environment.

Private Practice

After his clerkship with Judge Clark, Judge Robinson began his legal career as an associate with Haley & Olson in Waco, Texas. Judge Robinson hit the ground running working on bankruptcy and commercial cases in Texas and eventually participated in cases in many different bankruptcy courts throughout the United States. Judge Robinson stated that he was fortunate that Haley & Olson gave him responsibility early in his career and the opportunity to gain diverse experience as an associate.

Judge Robinson focused his practice on representing individuals, small businesses, large corporations, and financial institutions in a variety of matters. Throughout his career, Judge Robinson has applied his strong work ethic to learn new industries so that he could meet his client's needs. Judge Robinson also diversified his practice to handle matters such as collections, workouts, creditor rights enforcement, and general litigation as well as transactional matters such as contract negotiations, real estate, mergers and acquisitions, and financial transactions. His wide variety of experiences in private practice have helped Judge Robinson handle the diverse docket in the Austin and Midland Divisions.

Judge Robinson has also been an adjunct professor at Baylor Law School for 20 years where he teaches a class on the creditor debtor relationship. Judge Robinson

loves teaching the next generation of lawyers and likes to have fun while doing it. His class at Baylor Law features case law about a fistfight over an accordion and entertaining "what not to do" vehicle repossession videos. Students love the fact that Judge Robinson is approachable and always keeps his class interesting, and it is a favorite elective for them to take in their second and third years at Baylor Law School. One of Judge Robinson's favorite things about teaching is the interactions he has with students and observing their evolving understanding of complex legal concepts.

The Bench

Judge Robinson and his family moved to Austin, and he took the bench in in February 2023 upon the retirement of Judge Tony M. Davis. Through his first year on the bench, Judge Robinson has presided over a busy consumer and business docket. Judge Robinson enjoys the academic challenges of being on the bench and he takes pride in preparing for every single hearing by reading and researching all the pleadings submitted by counsel. Judge Robinson works hard to coordinate with his law clerks to anticipate legal issues that may come up during hearings, and occasionally even raises issues not anticipated by the parties themselves. When asked, Judge Robinson had the following advice for attorneys who aspire to be a bankruptcy judge:

- Continue learning and studying bankruptcy law.
- Get in the courtroom as much as possible.
- Be active in bankruptcy bar activities.
- Be respected by your peers and have a good temperament.

Judge Robinson has also taken his passion for mentorship and teaching to the bench. He has two term law clerks and spends time every day debriefing on hearings and

teaching them about the details of bankruptcy law and commercial litigation. Judge Robinson is also active in the Austin bar community taking part in Inns of Court and speaking at many of the bankruptcy events in the Western District.

Hobbies and Interests

When Judge Robinson is not working, he enjoys spending time with his

Author:



Jacob King is a term clerk for Judge Robinson.

family and watching Iowa sports. Judge Robinson often drives to Waco, Abilene, or Jackson, Mississippi, on the weekends to watch his sons play college baseball or have dinner with his daughter. Of course, that is only when college football is not in season. Judge Robinson is an avid Iowa Hawkeyes fan and has also indoctrinated his kids, so they watch every Iowa football game and debrief after every game!