

Topics of The Times

Pick Judges, Not Fights

The Justice Department, which helps President Bush pick Federal judges, has chosen an odd way to inform itself about judicial candidates in New York. It has told prospective nominees not to cooperate with the Association of the Bar of the City of New York — and told it to stop meddling in Federal judge selection.

The association has long been one of the most respected bar organizations. For years it has investigated and interviewed bench prospects and volunteered its findings to Justice, which is of course free to ignore them. Yet suddenly, that useful practice is deemed an outrage. Murray Dickman, special assistant to Attorney General Dick Thornburgh, wrote the association recently: "Your interference in the constitutional process of selecting and appointing Federal judges must end."

Mr. Dickman could stand lessons in grace and "the constitutional process." Citizens aren't guilty of interference when they petition Washington and participate in choosing their judges.

The Bush Administration has come to prefer the approval of the American Bar Association, which lately has given Administration nominees high grades. But as some failed nominations have shown, the judge-pickers can always use information when they make these lifetime appointments. Even from meddlers.