

Public service topic in Watson's campaign

By Heidi Toth/Staff Reporter

Attorney General candidate Kirk Watson spoke to law students and faculty Wednesday.

Kirk Watson, the Democratic nominee for Texas attorney general, spoke to law students and faculty Wednesday about the importance of lawyers and public service.

"I believe lawyers have a special obligation to public service," he said, saying one newspaper accused of him of having a sentimental view of the law, a charge he agrees with.

The Tech Law Democrats sponsored the event. Katy Merrill, a third-year student from Austin, introduced Watson to the crowd.

"Our world, our country and our state are all facing great changes, and great changes require great leadership," she said.

Watson informed the students to remember whom they will be serving upon completing college and entering the work field.

"Those of you who have the good fortune of getting that legal degree and being licensed, keep in mind that you are being licensed by the people," Watson told the group.

He discussed 10 points related to the legal profession and public service. Some of the topics were getting rid of society's labels, taking necessary risks, keeping a short-term focus but a long-term vision, and knowing when to quit.

Watson graduated from Baylor Law School in 1981 and has worked for a law firm in Austin, which he helped found, according to his biography. He has represented a

number of different interests, including Texas Tech. In 1999, Tech hired him to represent the university with the NCAA.

"I've always been very proud of the fact that Tech has enough confidence in me as a lawyer to hire me," he said.

Watson also was elected to two terms as mayor of Austin, according to his biography.

One major point of his speech was the need to throw away societal labels.

"Labels abdicate us of the responsibility to ever hear one another," he said. "Lawyers have the ability to create processes to help people listen to one another."

Watson discussed the need for elected officials to take risks in creating public policy, saying people have become timid in recent years.

"There is value in failure. There is value in not achieving the goal you set out to achieve," he said, adding that it's vital to recognize why goals were not achieved and what can be improved the next time.

Watson also talked about the state of homeowner's insurance in Texas. He said the high level of insurance they have to pay is gouging homeowners. He plans to create an insurance watch group, which will be comprised of the attorney general's office, consumer groups, representatives of the insurance industry and other relevant groups to keep tabs on trends in the industry.

He also told the law students to always do something they enjoy, even if they are not making much money or at the pinnacle of their professions.

"Do what you love, because life is hard enough," he said.

As attorney general, Watson said he wants to make the Supreme Court more open. Currently petitions to the Court are granted or denied by the justices in a closed meeting. He would like to make that process open to the public.

He also plans to continue Attorney General John Cornyn's work with improving child support. He would like to implement the possibility of jail time for offenders to let them know how serious his office is.

Recognizing that deadbeat parents in jail cannot be working and earning money to pay child support, Watson said. They will look at a work release program, where the parents can stay in jail from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. and on weekends and go to work during the day.

He also wants to make the processes of applying for and paying child support easier. He said he has a long list of ways, including booting cars, to enforce payment. Watson said the campaign was going well. The polls show him to be ahead and he has been successful in getting his message out across the state.

"Texans need to have an attorney general they know will be on their side," he said.

"I believe the attorney general ought to fight for Texans every day."

He calls the attorney general's position an advocate for Texas, not just in the courtrooms but also in everyday life. The AG needs to find and take care of loopholes and gaps in issues that affect everyone, he said, citing the insurance problem as an example.

Austin Jackson, a second-year law student from Lindale and president of the Tech Law Democrats, said minorities



HEATHER DOUGHERTY/Staff Photographer
DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE FOR Attorney General, Kirk Watson, speaks to students and the public at the law school Wednesday morning.

from have endorsed Watson across the state for the work he has done as mayor and in other positions.

"He's taking all the perspectives and trying to come up with a compromise that allows us all to move forward, instead of getting bogged down by one-sided rhetoric," he said.