

Senate to Vote on 24 Biden Judicial Nominees After Advancement



The U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee has advanced 24 judicial nominees who failed to secure approval in the previous Congress, following Democrats' new majority control of the panel, as President Joe Biden seeks to fill vacancies across the federal judiciary.

The 24 nominees, comprising four U.S. appeals court nominees and 20 district court nominees, were renominated by Biden last month and are expected to be voted on by the full Senate. The committee had either deadlocked or not voted on some of these nominees during the first two years of Biden's presidency when the Senate was split 50-50 between Democrats and Republicans, resulting in the committee's even 11-11 divide.

However, with Democrats now holding a 51-49 majority in the Senate, they are using their advantage to vote out nominees who had previously stalled due to Republican opposition.

During Thursday's hearing, Senate Judiciary Chairman Dick Durbin said there was no presumption that the nominees were "damaged goods" simply because they failed to make it onto the calendar in the previous two years. He added, "We just ran out of time."

Among the nominees who previously failed to advance is Julie Rikelman, an abortion rights lawyer at the Center for Reproductive Rights. She has been nominated for the Boston-based 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals and was deadlocked in a party-line vote in December 2021. However, her nomination was advanced by the committee on Thursday.

Other circuit court nominees who previously deadlocked but were approved on Thursday include Nancy Abudu, voting rights advocate with the Southern Poverty Law Center, who was nominated for the Atlanta-based 11th Circuit; Rachel Bloomekatz, an Ohio lawyer who has been picked for the Cincinnati-based 6th Circuit but had faced Republican opposition over her past advocacy on behalf of a gun control group.

The committee also advanced the nomination of Anthony Johnstone, a professor at the University of Montana, for the San Francisco-based 9th Circuit.

Meanwhile, among the most high-profile of the formerly stalled district court nominees to receive the committee's approval on Thursday is Dale Ho, a voting rights lawyer at the American Civil Liberties Union, who has been nominated to be a federal judge in Manhattan. He received an 11-10 vote. The committee also approved the nomination of Jessica Clarke, the civil rights bureau chief under New York Attorney General Letitia James since 2019, who will serve as a judge on the Manhattan court.

To be district court judges in the Central District of California, two other nominees, U.S. Magistrate Judge Kenly Kato, and Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Hernán Vera, also received the panel's approval.

The latest developments come as the Biden administration has faced obstacles in filling vacancies across the federal judiciary, particularly in the wake of former President Donald Trump's appointments of conservative judges, who now dominate the federal bench. Democrats are seeking to use their Senate majority to advance the president's nominees and shift the balance of the judiciary back towards a more liberal outlook.

REFERENCES:

24 Biden judicial nominees advance to Senate vote