

Fresno federal judge nominee finally gets Senate Judiciary Committee hearing

By John
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U.S. Magistrate Judge Dale A. Drozd

Longtime Sacramento federal magistrate Judge Dale A. Drozd is again scheduled to get his Senate Judiciary Committee hearing next week, and local court officials hope this time the hearing actually happens.

A March hearing for Drozd was canceled, frustrating overworked Fresno judicial officials who say his confirmation is critical to the court's operations. The hearing is scheduled Wednesday in Washington D.C.

"The vote is crucial," U.S. District Judge Lawrence J. O'Neill said. "We are cautiously optimistic for both Magistrate Judge Drozd — and the court."

O'Neill is currently the only full-time judge in Fresno's federal courthouse. Fellow U.S. District Judge Anthony W. Ishii — who Drozd would replace if he eventually wins confirmation — is currently on senior status and working half-time.

When his replacement starts in Fresno, Ishii will further reduce his work to quarter-time.

O'Neill and U.S. District Court Judge Morrison England, the chief judge for California's eastern federal judicial district, a region that includes both Fresno and Sacramento, have been in Washington D.C. the past several days in part to address Drozd's confirmation. Drozd was first nominated last year by President Barack Obama, and then renominated with the start of the new legislative session this year.

Carl Tobias, a professor at the University of Richmond School of Law in Virginia who specializes in the study of judicial selection, thinks Drozd's "chances are excellent, as he is a well qualified consensus nominee."

Tobias said Drozd has the support of both of California's senators — Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer — and the Fresno court's caseload crunch is well know to members of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

A vote will not come until several weeks after Wednesday's hearing. After that, the full Senate will vote on Drozd.

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