

Senate confirms federal judge to serve in Fresno, finally

By Michael Doyle
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The Senate on Monday confirmed U.S. Magistrate Judge Dale Drozd as a district judge to serve in Fresno's federal courthouse, filling a long-standing vacancy in one of the country's busiest judicial regions.

[The 60-year-old Drozd](#) will replace U.S. District Judge Anthony Ishii in the Eastern District of California. Ishii took senior status in 2012, enabling him to choose how many cases he wants to handle, while putting the White House on notice that it was time to find a replacement.

"I am so glad we're going to add this good man to the court," Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer of California said on the Senate floor. "Cases are piling up."

Drozd was confirmed on a 69-21 vote, following a final perfunctory Senate discussion that mostly featured Democratic complaints about slow judicial confirmations. None of the Republicans who voted against Drozd took to the Senate floor to explain their reasoning.

The district judge job carries with it lifetime tenure, a current annual salary of \$201,100 and, in California's Central Valley, an unrelentingly heavy workload.

The people of the Eastern District of California need his leadership, and the overworked judges of the Eastern District need his help. Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer of California

The [Eastern District of California](#) stretches from the Oregon border in the north to the [Tehachapi Mountains](#) in the south, and is the largest of the state's four federal judicial districts. The two main courthouses are in Sacramento and Fresno, while magistrate judges sit in Yosemite, Redding, and Bakersfield.

Between March 31, 2013 and March 31, 2014, a total of 4,882 civil cases were filed in the Eastern District. A total of 898 defendants faced new criminal charges during the same period.

Just last Friday, Oct. 2, about two dozen more cases were filed in the Eastern District, records show. Underscoring the myriad challenges awaiting Drozd, the Friday filers include one Corcoran state prison inmate challenging a plea bargain, another Corcoran inmate complaining of disability discrimination, and federal charges against a man accused of driving under the influence in Sequoia National Park.

Marijuana and other drug cases, and fraud and immigration-related offenses generally dominate the district's criminal docket, court records show.

"The people of the Eastern District really need his leadership," Boxer said, adding, "the overworked judges of the Eastern District really need his help."

Drozd has been serving as the district's chief magistrate judge, winning bipartisan praise along the way. No controversy attended his selection as district judge; his long wait for confirmation reflected, instead, routine Senate gamesmanship and a marked lack of urgency on Capitol Hill.

Drozd is only the seventh federal judge to be confirmed by the Senate this year, and according to the [liberal Center for American Progress](#), the Senate's judicial confirmation pace this year has been the slowest since 1953.

"Courts across the country are backlogged and cases linger for months or even years because of the obstructionist

leadership in the U.S. Senate,” [American Constitution Society](#) President Caroline Fredrickson charged Monday.

The chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Republican Sen. Charles Grassley of Iowa, countered that his panel “is moving at the same pace this year that it did under the Democrat control in 2007 during the last two years of President Bush’s presidency.”

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle would have you believe there is a vacancy crisis in this country. There is no vacancy ‘crisis.’ Republican Sen. Charles Grassley of Iowa.

A graduate of San Diego State University and UCLA law school, Drozd was originally appointed as magistrate judge in the Clinton administration. President Barack Obama first nominated him to the U.S. District Court position last November, at the recommendation of Boxer.

Boxer and Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein trade off making judicial recommendations to the White House.

After time for action ran out last Congress, Obama renominated Drozd this year. Drozd easily handled questions during a routine and relatively brief Senate Judiciary Committee hearing in April, and [won the committee’s approval in June](#).

Since then, he’s been waiting, with word of Monday’s vote not coming until late last week.

“A judge should be patient and treat everyone who comes before the court courteously and with dignity and respect,” Drozd told the panel. “I believe that I have demonstrated this temperament throughout my judicial career.”

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