

I am pleased to note that the majority leader is going to go right down the list on nominees and has stated earlier today that we would consider the nomination of Judge Brooks Smith, who is the chief judge of the Western District of Pennsylvania. The Third Circuit being in dire need of additional judicial manpower.

Chief Judge Edward R. Becker, one of the most distinguished judges in the United States, has commented about the serious state of affairs there, and I am anxious to see District Court Judge Brooks Smith receive his vote tomorrow. I am confident that he will be confirmed.

Judge Smith was reported out of the Judiciary Committee on a vote of 12 to 7, with three Democrats—Senator BIDEN, Senator KOHL, and Senator EDWARDS—voting for Judge Smith.

It is my hope that we will soon establish a protocol to eliminate the partisan differences which have plagued the Federal judicial nominating process for many years.

Now, with a Republican President, President Bush, and a Senate controlled by the Democrats, there have been delays which I believe are excessive. But I have to say at the same time that when President Clinton, a Democrat, was in the White House, and the Senate was controlled by Republicans, similarly the delays were excessive.

It is my view that the Federal judgeships are too important to be embroiled in partisan politics or payback or delay. I have proposed a protocol which would establish a timetable: So many days after a nominee is submitted by the President there ought to be a Judiciary Committee hearing. So many days later there ought to be action by the Judiciary Committee, voted up or down; and, if voted up, so many days later there ought to be floor consideration for confirmation by the entire Senate—with that not being an ironclad schedule. If cause is shown, at the discretion of the chairman of the committee on notification to the ranking member there could be a reasonable delay. Similarly, with the majority leader upon notice to the minority leader, there could be a reasonable delay on the vote before the Senate.

But I believe the American people generally are sick and tired of partisan politics. They want to see the Senate work together and nowhere is that more important than in the selection of Federal judges.

So I am pleased to speak about these three distinguished lawyers who have been confirmed by the Senate and will be sworn in soon. I am also looking forward to the addition of Judge Brooks Smith to the Court of Appeals of the Third Circuit, which is very much in need of his services.

I thank the Chair. In the absence of any other Senator seeking recognition, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

GREATER ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE PHARMACEUTICALS ACT OF 2001—Continued

Mr. REID. Mr. President, it is my understanding that we are on the generic drug bill. Is that right?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of Rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, hereby move to bring to a close the debate on Senator Dorgan's amendment No. 4299.

Byron L. Dorgan, Kent Conrad, Tim Johnson, James M. Jeffords, Ron Wyden, Paul Wellstone, Max Baucus, Ernest F. Hollings, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Zell Miller, Maria Cantwell, Jack Reed, Max Cleland, Patrick J. Leahy, Richard J. Durbin, Christopher J. Dodd, Harry Reid.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I send another cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of Rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close the debate on Calendar No. 491, S. 812, the Greater Access to Affordable Pharmaceuticals Act of 2001.

Harry Reid, Jon S. Corzine, Byron L. Dorgan, Ron Wyden, Maria Cantwell, Paul S. Sarbanes, Debbie Stabenow, Richard J. Durbin, Tom Daschle, Daniel K. Akaka, Jack Reed, Kent Conrad, Zell Miller, Charles E. Schumer, Ernest F. Hollings, Hillary Rodham Clinton.

VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I support the nomination of Julia Smith Gibbons and would have voted aye to confirm her nomination to the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals.

Mr. THOMPSON. Mr. President, I am very pleased to be here today as the Senate takes up for consideration the nomination of Judge Julia Smith Gibbons to be a U.S. Circuit Judge for the Sixth Circuit. I am grateful to my colleagues for their unanimous vote on Friday in support of cloture on this nomination to allow it to come to a vote today.

I support this nomination, and I am confident my colleagues will do so as well when they learn of Judge Gibbons's background and qualifications. Judge Gibbons will be a welcome addition to the Sixth Circuit. Before I address Judge Gibbons's qualifications, I want to let my colleagues know of the problems confronting the Sixth Circuit.

Today, 29 of the 179 U.S. Circuit Court judgeships remain unfilled. Eight of those 29 vacancies are in the Sixth Circuit. Let me put that into perspective: 28 percent of all of the vacant circuit judgeships in the country occur in just one of the 13 Circuits.

These 8 vacancies constitute one-half of the 16 judgeships allocated to the Sixth Circuit, which is twice the number of vacancies in any other circuit. Meanwhile, the court's caseload continues to rise.

Not surprisingly, the Sixth Circuit is also the slowest appellate court in the Federal system. According to the Chief Judge of the Sixth Circuit, the average time from filing to decision is 2 years, some 6 months slower than the next slowest circuit.

We must also recognize that the vacancy rate does not only affect the Sixth Circuit and litigants before that court. In order to fill its annual need for over 160 three-judge panels to hear cases, the Sixth Circuit must bring in visiting judges from other circuits or from district courts. Last fiscal year, visiting judge handled almost 20 percent of the Sixth Circuit's workload, and the Court relied on visiting judges twice as often as any other circuit.

While some of these visiting judges are senior judges, many are active circuit and district judges. These judges maintain a full docket themselves, in addition to pitching in to assist the Sixth Circuit. As district judges spend more time handling appellate cases, they must put off acting on their own dockets. The ripple effect caused by the vacancy rate on the Sixth Circuit is therefore much broader than we might suppose. According to a recent witness before the Judiciary Committee, the demands being made on district judges within the Sixth Circuit to fill seats on three-judge panels are so burdensome, that many district judges are now refusing what had been considered a prestigious assignment.

The vacancy rate on the Sixth Circuit is placing a significant burden on the entire Federal judiciary, which would be overburdened even if every vacancy were filled.

Some of the adverse impacts of the vacancy rate on the Sixth Circuit are not so readily discernible or can be quantified. For instance, visiting judges from outside the circuit or from the district courts may not be as familiar with Sixth Circuit law as the judges of the Sixth Circuit themselves. The court's reliance on such a large contingent of visiting judges increases the risk of intra-circuit conflict among different panels of the court, making en