



Senator Feinstein Statement on Senate Approval of Federal District Court Judges

- Judge Lawrence O'Neill Approved to Fill Vacancy in Eastern District -

February 1, 2007

Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, today announced that the Senate has confirmed three new federal district judges to serve in California, including Lawrence O'Neill for the Eastern District of California.

“California’s federal courts have been overloaded with cases,” Senator Feinstein said. **“The vacancy in the Eastern District was designated a judicial emergency because of the court’s heavy caseload. With the Senate’s approval of Judge O’Neill to fill the empty seat, relief is on its way. Judge O’Neill is uniquely qualified to step in and offer immediate relief to the Eastern District, because he has been a Magistrate Judge in the District since 1999.”**

In addition to O'Neill, the Senate today approved Valerie Baker for a district judgeship in the Central District of California. Philip Gutierrez was approved by the Senate on Tuesday for a district judgeship in the Central District of California.

“It is unfortunate that the Senate did not confirm these three nominees during the last Congress, and I am grateful to the Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Senator Leahy, for moving them forward promptly in the new Congress. The Senate’s quick action in confirming these judges will help to improve the administration of justice in California.”

The Central District, based in Los Angeles, is the largest and busiest federal judicial district in the nation. The Eastern District, based in Sacramento, is suffering from a particularly acute overload of cases. Judge O'Neill will join Judge Anthony Ishii and Senior Judge Oliver Wanger, who are currently the only judges on the Fresno Division of the Eastern District. Their average caseload in 2006 was the highest in the nation and nearly three times the average weighted caseload for federal district judges nationwide.

California has developed a bipartisan committee to select federal district court nominees and recommend qualified applicants to the President. The three judges approved this week were all originally selected by this bipartisan committee.

“These three judges came through the state’s judicial advisory commission, which gives me confidence that they come to the bench without an ideological agenda and prepared to serve all the people of California.”

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