

Statement of Ranking Member Tom Carper
“Nomination of the Honorable Patrick Pizzella to be a Member, Federal Labor Relations Authority, and Julie H. Becker, Steven N. Berk, and Elizabeth C. Wingo to be Associate Judges, Superior Court of the District of Columbia.”
Wednesday, March 2, 2016

As prepared for delivery:

I want to thank all of our nominees and their families for being here today. My thanks as well to Senator Lankford for chairing this hearing and for the good work that he and his staff have done in enabling us move forward in considering these nominees.

First, let me welcome Patrick Pizzella, who has been re-nominated to be a Member of the Federal Labor Relations Authority, or FLRA. The FLRA plays an important role in promoting constructive relationships between management and unions and, in turn, helps improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the federal government.

Mr. Pizzella has had a long career in public service, including the past few years serving in the position to which he has been re-nominated. We are grateful for his service and his willingness to continue to serve in this very important role.

I'm also pleased that we are also considering three nominees for the Superior Court of the District of Columbia today. Julie Becker, Steven Berk, and Elizabeth Wingo all have very impressive backgrounds and legal careers that I believe make them extremely well-qualified to serve as judges on the Superior Court. Thank you all for joining us and for your willingness to serve.

Before I close so we can hear from our nominees, I want to note that I am also pleased that, in the last months of last year, the Senate finally moved to confirm nominees to fill four other vacancies on the D.C. Superior Court.

That said, it is shameful that it took us two years to get two of those judges confirmed. I am delighted that we have started to move these nominees more quickly, and I hope we can continue that momentum with these three nominees and other nominees to the Superior Court going forward.

Most Americans probably don't know that local judges in the District of Columbia must be confirmed by the U.S. Senate. While they are comparable to the state courts that each of us is familiar with in our respective states, the D.C. Superior Court and Court of Appeals are operated by the federal government. Their judges are appointed by the President from a slate of candidates thoroughly vetted and recommended by a non-partisan nomination commission. They must then be confirmed by the Senate in order to serve 15 year terms.

But these courts don't handle federal matters. They are the local courts for the District of Columbia and hear cases related to local crimes and domestic and civil disputes between the people who live here in the District.

No other jurisdiction in our country must have its local judges approved by Congress. And, no other state is denied the representation here in the Senate that might help it pursue its priorities here, including nominations.

Some have suggested that local D.C. judges should not have to go through Senate confirmation. I continue to believe that we should seriously consider that idea. But at a minimum, we should develop an expedited process for the confirmation of these local judges.

In the meantime, I hope that the Senate will move forward quickly on the nominees we are considering today. I believe that the people of the District of Columbia are fortunate that men and women as impressive as these nominees are willing to go through a protracted nominating process, a great deal of scrutiny and a full measure of uncertainty, all for the possibility that they might one day serve on the bench in the District of Columbia.

Again, I thank you all for being here, for your testimony and for your responses to our questions.