

Pryor Confirmed Despite Environmentalist Warnings

WASHINGTON, DC, June 10, 2005 (ENS) - The Senate voted 53 to 45 Thursday to confirm former Alabama Attorney General William Pryor to a lifetime seat on the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals, which hears appeals of federal environmental cases in Florida, Georgia and Alabama.

Judge Pryor has been serving on this court since February 20, 2004, when he received a recess appointment from President George W. Bush to a seat vacated by another judge.

Two Democrats, Ben Nelson of Nebraska and Ken Salazar of Colorado, voted in favor of Pryor.

Three Republicans voted against him - Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins of Maine and Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island.

Conservation groups oppose Pryor's confirmation, saying he has accumulated an "aggressive anti-environmental record."

"Mr. Pryor aggressively pursued sweeping efforts to invalidate core environmental protections as unconstitutional, sided with corporate polluters by failing to crack down on clean water violations, and opposed the EPA's enforcement of Clean Air Act safeguards against power plant and oil refinery pollution that harms downwind states," said Glenn Sugameli, senior legislative counsel at Earthjustice.

"Judicial nominees like William Pryor are phase two of the Bush Administration's assault on federal environmental protections," Sugameli said. "When they can't convince Congress to repeal clean air, clean water and other legal safeguards, they threaten to strike down or rewrite those laws from the bench by putting partisan ideologues like Pryor on our independent federal courts."

Pryor's confirmation is supported by the Christian nonprofit group Focus on the Family Action and its chairman James Dobson, who said Thursday that his expectations were met when Pryor and other Republican supported judicial candidates nominated by President George W. Bush were confirmed over the past several weeks.

"Today we have seen a qualified judge confirmed to the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals. William Pryor has finally received the up-or-down vote to which he was entitled two years ago. His confirmation, and the confirmations of Priscilla Owen, Janice Rogers Brown, Richard Griffin and David McKeague, are nothing less than what President Bush and the American people have expected of the U.S. Senate," he said.

But Sugameli calls Pryor an "activist" judge who stood alone among the 50 state attorneys general in challenging the constitutionality of significant portions of the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act.

He testified before Congress that "EPA invaded the province of the States" by enforcing the Clean Air Act to prevent uncontrolled pollution increases at dirty coal-burning power plants and oil refineries, even though the pollution harms downwind states.

Pryor also demonstrated hostility to claims of environmental injustice, stating that, "environmental racism claims should fail generally."

"Mr. Pryor's record indicates that he will bring to the bench an activist agenda that will seriously undermine decades of established federal safeguards for clean water, clean air, endangered species, and the health of minority communities," said Sugameli.