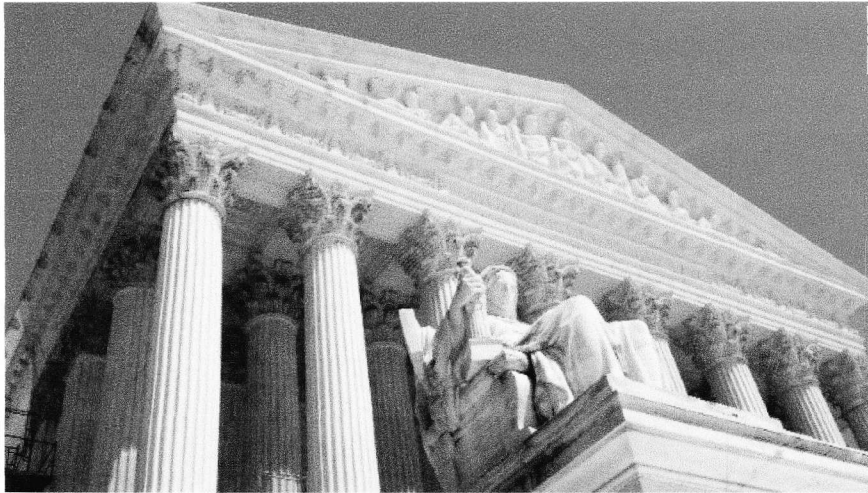


## Obama judicial nominees likely to reignite controversy

By Bill Mears, CNN Supreme Court Producer  
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*Republican opposition has delayed confirmation of several of President Barack Obama's federal court nominations.*

Washington (CNN) -- In a move likely to reignite the political battle over judges, President Barack Obama on Thursday renominated 33 people to the federal courts, including a New York lawyer twice blocked by Republicans worried she would be an "activist" on the bench.

Caitlin Halligan was one of two nominees named again by Obama to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of

Columbia, seen by many as a professional steppingstone to the Supreme Court.

Halligan is currently general counsel for the Manhattan District Attorney's Office in New York. She would fill the seat vacated by John Roberts, who joined the Supreme Court as chief justice in 2005.

In his announcement, Obama said his nominees should have been given up-or-down Senate votes before the 112th Congress adjourned.

"Several have been awaiting a vote for more than six months, even though they all enjoy bipartisan support. I continue to be grateful for their willingness to serve and remain confident that they will apply the law with the utmost impartiality and integrity," he said. "I urge the Senate to consider and confirm these nominees without delay, so all Americans can have equal and timely access to justice."

By law, the president must resubmit nominations that did not receive floor action in the previous session of Congress.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy, D-Vermont, last week urged Republicans not to stop Obama's pending nominations.

"There are more judicial vacancies now - 75 - than when President Obama was sworn into office four years ago," said Leahy. "The nominations of too many qualified judicial nominees have needlessly languished on the Senate calendar."

Chief Justice laments 'fiscal cliff' effects on federal courts

In a rare move, Senate Republicans voted in December 2011 to block Halligan the first time she was tapped for the court, complaining the 46-year-old Ohio native was too liberal and would be an activist on the bench.

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell said at the time that Halligan met the "extraordinary circumstances" standard for a filibuster under a 2005 Senate agreement that allowed filibusters of judicial nominees only in extreme cases.

McConnell complained about Halligan's legal positions on gun rights, detainee rights, and immigration and said she would bring an activist agenda to the court.

Democrats had defended Halligan as a "superbly qualified nominee," in the words of Leahy. Sen. Chuck Schumer, D-New York, called her a moderate and said Republicans have distorted her record.

Halligan's 2012 renomination languished without action, typical of an election year, when confirmations for a variety of political and practical reasons are given a lower legislative priority.

Also renominated for the D.C. Circuit is Sri Srinivasan, the principal deputy solicitor general at the Justice Department, who has argued more than 20 cases before the Supreme Court. He would be the appeals court's first Asian-American, if confirmed.

Republicans had been criticized for delaying floor votes on many nominees in the president's first term in office. But the White House, too, has come under fire for not moving quickly to fill growing bench vacancies.

Some moderates from both parties have long lamented threats of delays and filibuster attempts of most presidential appointments. They say ongoing vacancies have created a crisis in many federal courts, with bulging dockets being handled by too few judges.

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