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Senate confirms first openly gay U.S. appeals-court judge

The Senate voted 98-0 to confirm Justice Department attorney Todd Hughes for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit on Tuesday, seating the first openly gay federal circuit judge in history.

By [David G. Savage](#)

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WASHINGTON — By a unanimous vote Tuesday, the Senate confirmed the first openly gay judge to sit on a U.S. court of appeals.

Todd M. Hughes, 46, a veteran Justice Department lawyer, will serve on the Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, a Washington, D.C.-based court that decides appeals and claims involving patents, trademarks, veterans benefits and international trade disputes.

Although his sexual orientation was noted when President Obama made the nomination, it did not figure in his confirmation, and he won approval on a 98-0 vote.

“I am proud that today the Senate is finally taking this critical step to break down another barrier and increase diversity on our federal bench,” said Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy, D-Vt.

The White House hailed the confirmation and said it was in line with Obama’s drive to bring greater diversity to the federal courts.

“Like all of the president’s nominees, Hughes has the intellect, experience, integrity and temperament to be a successful judge. He is also gay,” said White House Counsel Kathryn Ruemmler.

Ruemmler noted that the president’s “judicial firsts” included naming the first Latina to the Supreme Court in Justice Sonia Sotomayor and appointing the first female federal judges of Chinese, Filipino, Korean, South Asian and Vietnamese descent.