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Key Players in the Sotomayor Nomination

SENATE | WHITE HOUSE

Leadership



Harry Reid Nevada Democrat Majority Leader

Controls the floor and the Democratic strategy and is ultimately responsible for the confirmation in the Senate. Republicans have criticized his remark that he had not read "a single one" of Judge Sotomayor's opinions and "won't have to read one" before the process is over.



Mitch McConnell Kentucky Republican Minority Leader

Opposed Judge Sotomayor's confirmation to the appellate court in 1998, citing concern that "she would be a judicial activist," but promised to look at this nomination "afresh." Has indicated that a filibuster is unlikely, but added that the Democrats have "firmly established" a precedent for them.

[MORE »](#) *On his standards for a nominee*

Judiciary Committee

At the end of the hearings, the Senate Judiciary Committee will vote on whether the nomination should go to the full Senate for a vote. With 12 Democrats on the 19-member committee, the odds are favorable for the nominee. Republicans have expressed concerns about the [judge's comments](#) on how her sex and ethnicity shaped her decisions and the role of appeals courts in making policy.



Patrick J. Leahy Vermont Democrat Chairman

Believes that Judge Sotomayor will be "in the mold of Justice Souter, who understands the real world impact of the court's decisions, rather than most of the conservative activists who second-guess Congress." Has voted against three Supreme Court nominees, of 11, since taking office in 1975: Justices Alito and Thomas, and Robert H. Bork.

[MORE »](#) *On Sotomayor's comments and interest groups*



Jeff Sessions Alabama Republican Ranking Member

Became the ranking Republican this year when Senator Arlen Specter joined the Democratic Party. Was [blocked by the Judiciary Committee in 1986](#) when he was nominated for a spot on the federal bench by President Reagan, prompting him to acknowledge that "you have a little more sympathy than normal for the nominee having been a part of that process, and it gives you a commitment to fairness." Believes the July 13 date to begin the hearings is "too early" to finish a thorough review. Judge Sotomayor's supporters point out that Mr. Sessions's cautious approach seemed to stand in contrast to his view of Justice Alito's confirmation in 2005, [when he urged fast action](#), saying "We don't need to read everything he has written."

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Herb Kohl Wisconsin Democrat

Came away **“impressed”** from his meeting with Judge Sotomayor, describing her as “very intelligent, warm and engaging.” Opposed Justices Alito and Thomas, following most of his Democratic colleagues



Orrin G. Hatch Utah Republican

Voted for Judge Sotomayor’s confirmation to the appellate court in 1998. But has been a vocal critic of her comments on race and gender and the role of the courts this time around because “now we’re talking about the most important court on earth.” Has voted for all Supreme Court nominees since 1981, including Robert H. Bork.

MORE » [On Sotomayor’s comments](#)



Dianne Feinstein California Democrat

Said she believed that Judge Sotomayor was **“well-steeped in the law and well-steeped in precedent,”** referring to Roe v. Wade, the landmark 1973 abortion rights decision. One of two woman on the committee, she said she understood the feelings behind Judge Sotomayor’s “wise Latina” remark, adding it still was not the “right thing to say.”

MORE » [On Sotomayor and on courts making policy](#)



Charles E. Grassley Iowa Republican

Voted against Judge Sotomayor’s 1998 appointment to the appellate court but says he **does not remember** the reasons behind his vote. “Even if I knew why I voted against her, I still need to see her as a new person and make up my mind after the hearing,” he said. Has voted for all Supreme Court nominees since 1981, including Robert H. Bork, but has said that Judge Souter was his **“biggest disappointment”** on the court.

MORE » [On Sotomayor’s comments](#)



Russ Feingold Wisconsin Democrat

Issued a **statement** soliciting feedback from his constituents about the nomination, saying his “decision on whether or not to support the Sotomayor nomination will be based in part on her qualifications, judicial temperament, objectivity and integrity.”



Jon Kyl Arizona Republican

Voted against Judge Sotomayor’s 1998 appointment to the appellate court because **he was concerned** that “she would not judge cases based on their legal merits but on her preconceived ideas.” Says her **ethnicity will not play a part** in his decision, despite the presence of a large Hispanic population in his home state. Has been **cautious in his criticism** of the judge, saying Republicans “need to hold our fire until we examine all of these opinions and writings,”

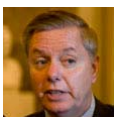
MORE » [On Sotomayor](#)



Charles E. Schumer New York Democrat

Leading the confirmation effort in the Senate as the White House-designated “sherpa” to guide Judge Sotomayor on Capitol Hill. Urged the president to nominate a Hispanic to the Supreme Court in a **letter**, recommending Judge Sotomayor and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar.

MORE » [On Republican opposition](#)



Lindsey Graham South Carolina Republican

Like Senator Kyl, he **directed most of his criticism at Mr. Obama**. Said Judge Sotomayor was an “impressive person” who has “accomplished a lot in life.” But added that “as a conservative Republican, I would have never picked her to be on the Supreme Court.”

MORE » [On the confirmation process](#)


Richard J. Durbin Illinois Democrat

Said Judge Sotomayor “is going to face a [higher level of scrutiny](#) than other people might” as the first Hispanic woman to be nominated to the Supreme Court. Also said she would likely face questions on abortion, the rights of terror detainees and limits on executive power.

[MORE »](#) [On the confirmation process](#)


John Cornyn Texas Republican

Faces competing pressures as a conservative former Texas Supreme Court justice and a senator with a large Hispanic constituency. As chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee, he has to worry about how the confirmation battle plays across the nation. Like Senator Sessions, cautioned his colleagues not to “[prejudge or preconfirm](#)” Judge Sotomayor before the hearings. [Criticized](#) the radio host Rush Limbaugh and Newt Gingrich, the former House speaker, for calling the judge a racist for her [comments about how her sex and ethnicity had shaped her decisions](#).

[MORE »](#) [On his standards for a nominee](#)


Benjamin L. Cardin Maryland Democrat

His first Supreme Court nomination. After meeting Judge Sotomayor, said he was “very [impressed](#) with her background, her experience as a trial judge, appellate judge, as a prosecutor, adding that “she will follow the law, the precedent.”

[MORE »](#) [On his standards for a nominee](#)


Tom Coburn Oklahoma Republican

Has not directly said much about the nominee, except to say that he was [concerned](#) about Judge Sotomayor’s 2005 comment that the “court of appeals is where policy is made” and that life experiences “are not supposed to impact you on the court.”

[MORE »](#) [On his standards for a nominee](#)


Sheldon Whitehouse Rhode Island Democrat

His first Supreme Court nomination. At their meeting, he [questioned her](#) about her demeanor on the bench and said that her [blunt and vigorous style of questioning](#) did not suggest that “she is either impolite or uncivil.”


Amy Klobuchar Minnesota Democrat

Her first Supreme Court nomination. Called Judge Sotomayor “a [unique nominee](#)” and “someone who doesn’t just see the law as some dusty book in your grandma’s basement, but someone who sees the law in how it affects people in their everyday lives.”

[MORE »](#) [On judicial temperament](#)


Ted Kaufman Delaware Democrat

His first Supreme Court nomination as a senator. Was closely involved in the confirmation process of eight other nominees as Mr. Biden’s chief of staff in the Senate for nearly two decades. After meeting Judge Sotomayor, said she “understands that [upholding the Constitution](#) requires more than just intelligence — it requires an appreciation of how one’s decisions affect ordinary Americans.”

[MORE »](#) [On judicial activism](#)


Arlen Specter Pennsylvania Democrat

Was the highest ranking Republican on the committee until his switch to the Democratic Party this year. As chairman from 2005 to 2007, oversaw the confirmation hearings for Chief Justice Roberts and Justice Alito. Crossed party lines as a Republican in 1987 to oppose the nomination of Robert H. Bork, the only nominee he has opposed since being elected in 1981. Voted for Judge Sotomayor’ confirmation to the appellate court in 1998.

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Al Franken Minnesota Democrat

Said he would like to serve as a “people’s proxy” during the hearings. His first Supreme Court nomination (he once played a Democratic senator in a “Saturday Night Live” skit about the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings in 1991).

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