



THOMAS MESKILL

Setback for ABA

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A Nixon

Judge Is

Finally OKd

Washington

Nixon nominee Thomas J. Meskill won Senate confirmation yesterday as a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit after a fight that lasted more than eight months.

The vote, 54 to 36, was a setback for the American Bar Association, which had managed for a decade to prevent confirmation of federal bench nominees it rated as unqualified.

ABA officials, rallying more than 300 members of its House of Delegates, waged a wide anti-Meskill lobbying campaign, urging senators to reject the former Connecticut governor for lack of distinction and of legal experience.

But many senators, led by his sponsor, Lowell P. Weicker Jr. (Rep-Conn.), maintained that the ABA improperly disregarded the public service experience of Meskill, who at 47 has been mayor of New Britain, a two-term congressman and governor from 1971 to 1974.

California Senators Alan Cranston and John Tunney, both Democrats, voted against the nomination.

Meskill was criticized for having only a modest law practice before entering politics and for never having appeared before the court for which he was nominated. The Second Circuit court, one of the nation's most prestigious, handles appeals from the federal courts of New York, Connecticut and Vermont.

Opponents also charged that Meskill as governor tolerated abuses in state leasing policies that are still a scandal in Connecticut, even showing indifference to the appearance of propriety.

His supporters emphasized that critics uncovered no wrongdoing on Meskill's part.

Meskill was nominated August 9 in one of former President Nixon's last official acts before he resigned. Before that, Mr. Nixon had never nominated a judge for the federal district or appellate bench over the objection of the ABA's 12-man judiciary committee.

Asked yesterday how he accounted for the nomination, Meskill said, "Maybe Mr. Nixon knew more about me than the ABA did." He said he was not a personal friend of Mr. Nixon's but had been a loyal supporter of his administration and that of President Ford, who resubmitted his name to the Senate last fall and again in January.

"I may hold a record of three nominations by two presidents," Meskill said. The vote against him was considered a record also. Judiciary Committee staff members said they could not remember even a roll call vote on a judgeship nomination.

Most nominations for lower court judgeships go through the Senate without a fight or else opponents give up if the nomination clears the Judiciary Committee.

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