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NOMINATIONS & APPOINTMENTS

President Donald J. Trump Announces Intent to Nominate Edward C. Prado to be Ambassador to the Argentine Republic

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For years, Argentines have looked at the U.S. judiciary with a jaundiced eye, after a series of unfavorable rulings in the Southern District of New York during Argentina's lengthy dispute with U.S. bondholders. But there are 94 district courts in the United States, and it appears Argentines harbor no ill will toward the Western District of Texas, or to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, in New Orleans, home to Judge Edward C. Prado.

On January 17, Argentines appeared optimistic about President Trump's [nomination](#) of Judge Prado to be ambassador to Argentina. Judge Prado – who served as a district court judge for 19 years and as an appellate judge for the past 14 years, and earlier served as the U.S. attorney for the Western District of Texas – has no diplomatic experience. But he is a fluent Spanish speaker, and the nomination appeared to signal the importance of Argentina to the White House. The

U.S. ambassador's office in Buenos Aires, and the palatial ambassadorial residence nearby in Palermo, have been vacant since Mr. Trump removed all non-career ambassadors upon his inauguration, including U.S. Ambassador to Argentina Noah Mamet. (Mr. Mamet now serves as a co-chairman of the Argentina Project in the Wilson Center's Latin American Program.)

In Washington, Judge Prado's nomination came as a surprise. It is uncommon to see federal judges selected for ambassadorships, and Judge Prado is unknown in Latin America foreign policy circles. Judge Prado – who was nominated for his district court judgeship by President Reagan and to the appellate court by President George W. Bush – has no known connection to Mr. Trump or Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, a fellow Texan. (He does know Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who served as a U.S. attorney in Alabama at the same time Judge Prado held that position in Texas. In 2003, while Mr. Sessions served on the Senate Judiciary Committee, he supported Judge Prado's nomination for the appellate court. "I think your integrity, your work ethic, your commitment to America are going to stand you in good stead," he said.)

For some observers, the nomination was simply a ploy to free up a federal judgeship, and replace a 70-year-old with a young, conservative jurist in a lifetime position. "The naked opportunism is as transparent as it is brilliant," the Above the Law blog [observed](#), predicting future "cushy posts" for "aging Reaganauts on the bench." Indeed, despite struggling to fill vacancies atop the Executive Branch, Mr. Trump has been shoveling conservative nominees to the Senate to fill the plentiful vacancies on the federal judiciary.

But it is not unusual to see a political appointee serving as ambassador to Argentina. Mr. Mamet and his predecessor, Vilma Martínez, were political appointees, who followed three consecutive career foreign service officers, including Tony Wayne, now a Wilson Center fellow. So far, 60 percent of President Trump's ambassadorial nominees are not career diplomats, including the [nominee](#) for Chile, businessman Andrew Gellert.

"I believe strongly that Judge Prado is an excellent choice for this position, based on both his professional experience and personal... skills," Stephen Clarke, one of Judge Prado's former clerks and an associate at Winstead, a Texas firm, told us in an interview. He is not Judge Prado's only admirer. In 2003, Charles Schumer, a Democratic senator from New York, recommended Judge Prado to President George W. Bush as a potential Supreme Court nominee.

That bipartisan appeal – in a [profile](#), the Federal Bar Association called Judge Prado "a moderate renowned for fairness and impartiality" – might have led to Mr. Trump's decision to "functionally deport Prado," as Above the Law put it. But it is unfair to say Judge Prado's Spanish skills are his only relevant credential for the ambassador gig. Though he has no diplomatic experience, he is considered approachable and informal. At his nomination hearing in 1984, John Tower, a Texas senator at the time, praised Judge Prado's "excellent judicial temperament." The San Antonio Express-News said Judge Prado is "known for his wise-cracking court demeanor."

Judge Prado also has international experience. The Fifth Circuit has jurisdiction over a swath of the U.S.-Mexico border, and it frequently addresses immigration disputes. Judge Prado has also lectured overseas about the U.S. adversarial justice system and related subjects, including in China, Spain and Mexico. In 2009, he spoke at the Universidad de Buenos Aires law school,

where he discussed the independence of the U.S. courts, a somewhat foreign concept for Argentines. “I have had the opportunity of going to different countries and working with judges throughout Latin America,” Judge Prado said in an interview with his alma mater, the University of Texas, in 2011. “It makes you appreciate our system. Our system isn’t perfect, but compared to everything else there is, our system is pretty darn good.”

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