

Beat: Politics

U.S. Senate rejects Obama`s controversial pick for top civil rights post

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USPA News - Lawmakers from both parties in the U.S. Senate on Wednesday rejected President Barack Obama`s controversial appointment for Debo P. Adegbile to head the Justice Department`s Civil Rights Division, following criticism of his involvement in the legal defense of a convicted cop killer. Adegbile, 42, needed 51 senators to support him in order to clear a procedural hurdle needed to advance to a final vote, and even Vice President Joe Biden was on hand to potentially cast a tie-breaking vote.

But eight Senate Democrats joined with Republicans to reject the nomination, putting the final tally at 47 to 52 in opposition to the appointment. The November nomination of the former NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund`s litigation director was strongly opposed by conservatives due to his involvement in the defense of Mumia Abu-Jamal, who was convicted of the 1981 murder of Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner. Abu-Jamal was convicted on July 2, 1982, and sentenced to death the following day, but the NAACP Legal Defense Fund represented the prisoner in getting his death sentence overturned. "Despite already being capably represented by a well-funded legal team, Mr. Adegbile chose to get involved in the defense of Abu-Jamal," former Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge said last month. In a statement released following Wednesday`s vote, Obama scolded the senators who voted against the nomination, calling it a "travesty based on wildly unfair character attacks" and saying that Washington politics "used the rules" against Adegbile. "The fact that his nomination was defeated solely based on his legal representation of a defendant runs contrary to a fundamental principle of our system of justice," Obama said. Wednesday`s vote marked the first rejection of an Obama nominee since Democrats implemented a rule change in November that blocked Republican obstruction on almost all presidential nominations. Since then, numerous administration and judicial nominees have been approved and passed through the Senate.

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UPA United Press Agency LTD
483 Green Lanes
UK, London N13NV 4BS
contact (at) unitedpressagency.com
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