Judges
Northern District Shortchanged

The Northern District of Federal Court is understaffed and overworked.
It has too few judges and magistrates, and too many cases. The combination of the two subjects litigants to excessive delays.
The Northern District encompasses 32 counties and stretches from the Canadian border to the Pennsylvania state line and from Auburn to Albany. The court is authorized four judges, but only has two. It really needs a minimum of five judges.
The district now has two full-time magistrates, but needs at least three. Federal magistrates' positions were created to help district judges. Magistrates are restricted to handling pre-trial and discovery functions, arraignments, and misdemeanor cases when the parties involved consent. When Fort Drum, near Watertown, begins to fill up, we can expect to see an increase in the type of cases magistrates can handle.
The two active judges in the Northern District are both Syracussen — Chief Judge Howard Munson and Judge Neal P. McCurn. Their caseload today is about 1,400 cases apiece. The national average is about 325. A year ago the Northern District had the third-highest caseload per judge in the nation. Today it is probably the highest.
The district is fortunate to have had for the last several years two senior (retired) judges who are workaholics — Judge James Foley of Albany and Judge Edmund Port of Auburn. Both men have handled far more cases than most retired judges do. But this situation will change soon, for Judge Port is retiring completely next month.
So things are going from bad to worse.
Congress finally got around in July 1984 to authorizing a fourth federal judge for the Northern District. But although a Binghamton man has been recommended for the job, no appointment has yet been made.
In the meantime, the district's third judge, Roger J. Miner, was promoted to a seat on the Second Circuit, U.S. Court of Appeals. That meant that his caseload of about 848 was dumped on Judges Munson and McCurn. And of course, Judge Miner's vacancy has not yet been filled, and probably won't be for months. U.S. Sen. Alfonse D'Amato is still accepting recommendations for the position.
Authorization for a fifth judge for the Northern District has been approved by the federal Judicial Conference, but has not reached Congress yet.
The judicial shortage in the Northern District is little short of scandalous. There is no way Sen. D'Amato, Congress, President Ronald Reagan or anyone else can justify or defend the dillydallying that has left the entire Northern, Central and Eastern New York area without the judicial resources to meet the public need.
We need more judges, and we need them now. If they can't be appointed fast enough to do any good, then arrangements should be made to "borrow" half a dozen jurists from the Southern District of New York — which has more than 10 times as many judges whose caseloads is only a quarter of that of Northern District judges, and five times as many magistrates as are available in the Northern District.

There is no way to defend the dillydallying that has left the court without adequate judicial resources to meet the public need.