

AFJ INSIDER

President's Message



Dear Friend,

Last week, the Center for Judicial Renewal, a coalition of extreme right, ethno-religious groups promoted a list of potential Supreme Court nominees they've given a "green rating." The list is what you would expect.

AFJ researched the judicial records of the three judges on their list and vehemently opposed their confirmations. Here's why:

- [**Judge James Ho**](#), now on the 5th Circuit, authored a memo on the Geneva Conventions referenced in the infamous "Torture Memo," providing legal justification for inhumane interrogation tactics like waterboarding.
- [**Judge Kyle Duncan**](#), also on the 5th Circuit, has spent his career opposing reproductive rights and LGBTQ equality, defending discriminatory voting laws, and dismantling protections for immigrants. His rulings, including voting to allow a ban on abortions in Texas during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the "irreparable harm," highlight the peril of his ideology.
- Finally, [**Judge Lawrence VanDyke**](#), now on the 9th Circuit, challenged the Affordable Care Act's contraception coverage and supported Arizona's 20-week abortion ban while serving as solicitor general of Montana. Upon his nomination to the 9th Circuit, the American Bar Association [**rated him unqualified**](#), concluding that he was "arrogant, lazy, an ideologue, and lacking in knowledge of the day-to-day practice including procedural rules."

This is what we're up against. And this is why AFJ's work to identify and advocate for outstanding jurists is so important.

Over the past five years, our Building the Bench program has identified hundreds of attorneys who represent the breadth of diversity in our country and bring invaluable professional diversity to the bench. We've advocated for judges who have been in the trenches of our movements, fighting for labor and economic justice, consumer rights, reproductive rights, criminal justice, democracy and voting rights, and so much more. **And with your support, we've won.** AFJ has played a critical role in seeing the confirmations of some of the most [highly-regarded and professionally diverse judges](#) in history.

Bottom line – we are doing the necessary and critical work to elevate and support the confirmation of judges who will protect our collective rights and freedoms. We couldn't do this without your support – thank you for being a vital part of our mission.

All the best,
Rakim

P.S. To mark May Day (International Workers' Day 2024), Alliance for Justice issued [an addendum](#) to our report on the federal courts' dearth of judges with experience serving workers. The update highlights labor-side attorneys nominated and confirmed to the courts since the original report, along with recent court cases that have impacted workers.



Our Impact

Federal Courts

As the SCOTUS term winds down, President Biden remains steadfast in nominating professionally diverse candidates like former public defender Judge Joseph E. Saporito in the Middle District of Pennsylvania. The nominations of Judge Embry J. Kidd for the 11th Circuit and Judge Meredith A. Vacca as the **first person of color** for the U.S. District Court for the Western District of New York signal a **continued commitment to judicial excellence** and progress in **addressing persistent demographic disparities on the federal bench**. Meanwhile, Senate Judiciary Committee advancements include favorably voting on Judge Rebecca Pennell's nomination, and an upcoming hearing for exceptional nominees like Judges Michelle Williams Court, Anne Hwang, and Cynthia Valenzuela Dixon. These **three movement lawyers** would bring diverse backgrounds and experiences that would enrich the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California. Notably, the potential confirmation of Judge Nancy Maldonado as the **first Latino judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit**, and several other exceptional nominees await a vote on the Senate floor.

Critical nominations like those of Stacey Neumann, Danna Jackson, and Detra Shaw Wilder **hinge on blue slips** from Senators Susan Collins, Steven Daines, and Rick Scott and Mark Rubio, respectively, highlighting the need for procedural reforms long advocated by the Alliance for Justice. Recent Supreme Court rulings, notably in *Culley v. Marshall*, have stirred debates on access to justice, while key cases on gun safety, administrative law, voting rights, and more remain pending. Alliance for Justice continues to advocate for progress and provides updates as the term unfolds.

State Courts

AFJ Action Campaign recently held its first-ever Gavel In event, a virtual panel discussing state courts and their impact on our everyday life. This episode, **"Democracy on the Docket in North Carolina,"** featured special guests, Justices Anita Earls and Allison Riggs from the North Carolina Supreme Court. They discussed the critical role state supreme courts play in protecting democracy and voting rights, particularly in light of increasing political tensions across the nation.

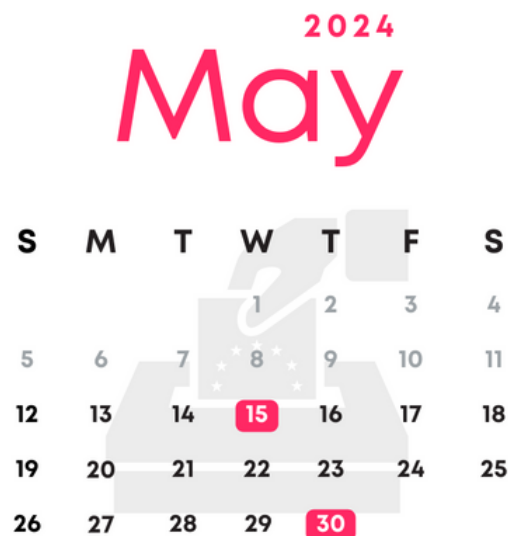


Meanwhile, noteworthy changes are underway in other states' judicial landscapes. In Minnesota, Governor Tim Walz appointed Theodora Gaitas and Sarah Hennesy to the state supreme court, giving the court a female majority. The appointments also mark a significant shift in the court's professional diversity, with both women bringing decades of experience as public defenders to the bench. In South Carolina, the upcoming replacement of a retiring justice has sparked discussions about diversifying the court. Recent primary elections in Illinois and Ohio saw incumbent justices secure victories, reflecting ongoing electoral dynamics. Moreover, announcements of retirements in Michigan and Wisconsin hint at future shifts in their respective supreme courts, illustrating the evolving nature of judicial bodies across the country.



Bolder Advocacy

Earlier this year, Bolder Advocacy released the 5th Edition of The Connection, a guide for 501(c)(3)s, 501(c)(4)s, and Political Organizations. Since then, exciting new developments have emerged, with an [FEC advisory opinion](#) impacting the work of some organizations engaged in door-to-door canvassing activities. For more details, [download your free copy](#) of The Connection and refer to a [client memo](#) by Trister, Ross, Schadler & Gold, PLLC for an in-depth analysis.



Wednesday
15

**How Your Nonprofit Can
Influence Policy Through
Ballot Measure Campaigns**

Tuesday
30

**Building Nonprofit
Partnerships with 501(c)(3)s,
501(c)(4)s, Unions, and Political
Organizations**

Save the date for two public webinars this May: "[How Your Nonprofit Can Influence Policy Through Ballot Measure Campaigns](#)" on Wednesday, May 15, and "[Building Nonprofit Partnerships with 501\(c\)\(3\)s, 501\(c\)\(4\)s, Unions, and Political Organizations](#)" on Thursday, May 30. Lastly, catch our latest Rules of the Game [podcast](#) episodes where we explore [resource sharing](#), [ballot measure advocacy takeaways](#), and [election season advocacy](#). Let's make our voices heard!



Advocacy Wins

Native American Youth And Family Center (NAYA)

Join us in celebrating the remarkable advocacy successes of Native American Youth And Family Center (NAYA). With support from Bolder Advocacy, NAYA has achieved significant milestones, from enhancing record-keeping practices to championing legislative victories. Through dynamic coalition building and expanded advocacy efforts, NAYA has made tangible impacts on issues vital to our communities. These accomplishments reflect NAYA's steadfast dedication to cultural empowerment and community well-being. Together, we're shaping policies and amplifying voices for a brighter future. Read more about their inspiring journey in [our latest blog](#).

Membership & Outreach Community

Our spotlighted member for April and May is [The Arc](#). In case you missed it, our Member Spotlight for February and March was [Mi Familia Vota](#).



Peggy Lichter

My spouse, David DiDomenico, and I give jointly. We reside in Boulder, Colorado, and have been supporting AFJ for at least 10 years. As stated on AFJ's website, they have been "the leader in advocating for a fair and independent justice system," and they have "changed the conversation around the critical importance of our courts." To think - to know - that it's possible for a citizen of this country to go before a judge who is more partisan than objective – whether right of center, or left, even at the highest levels - is to know that our democracy is fraying. To us, the United States has been the cornerstone of democracy in our lifetimes, and we need to do our best to protect and preserve that.



AFJ is working hard to ensure that

democracy remains part of the American framework —

for us, for our children, for our grandchildren.

PEGGY LICHTER

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