

AFJ INSIDER

Dear Friend,



The Trump administration could soon announce the first of its judicial nominees for consideration by the senate within weeks after they're announced. Mirroring the brand of Trump's executive appointments, we anticipate his judicial nominees will be selected not for their judicial acumen but for their extreme positions and loyalty to Trump's leadership, including Trump's worship of the unitary executive theory (which in our opinion, is another word for authoritarianism). You can read my recent [Democracy Docket](#) piece which goes into detail on this point at the link.

The Biden administration successfully filled 235 federal court vacancies. We are thrilled that not only did the administration surpass Trump's count (234), but that those confirmed are the most diverse in history including the confirmation of more Black women to circuit courts than all other presidents combined. AFJ was there every step of the way from highlighting the records of potential supreme court nominees ahead of the vacancy, to celebrating the confirmation of Ketanji Brown Jackson, to advocating vociferously for the confirmation of well-qualified, professionally and demographically diverse jurists at all levels of our federal courts. As a result of the Biden administration's work, and the advocacy of organizations like AFJ to fill every vacancy, the second Trump administration inherited just 57 vacancies – 51 district court and six circuit court vacancies to fill. Thank goodness for small favors.

That said, the importance of these 57 vacancies and those who are nominated to fill them, is paramount. We have so many examples of the types of jurists that the administration appointed between 2016-2020, such as Judge Aileen Cannon — [who tried to protect Trump](#) in the classified documents case and [who has been called](#) a “favorite member of the Trump campaign” — as the mold for others to follow.

But AFJ had victories throughout that period as well – shutting down the confirmation of some of the worst of the administration's nominees - and we will again. We will rigorously interrogate new nominees' legal records and stated positions with the help of a newly hired Director of Research and Advocacy. We will equip our allies, partners, and champions on the Hill with the fact sheets, talking points, and tools to advocate against the most noxious nominees. We will publicize the records of existing Trump appointed judges to demonstrate the threat to our rights that these potential jurists pose. And through our Building the Bench program, we will continue to develop the pipeline of jurists for future, friendlier circumstances. Part of the reason we were so successful during the Biden administration was because our Building the Bench program kept its eye on the long run even under the first Trump administration.

The battle we fight will be uphill, but it is not Sisyphean. We will have victories to celebrate, and we will continue to make progress on the state court level, where so many of the current administration's policies can be checked.

"Faithless is he who says farewell when the road darkens."

J.R.R. Tolkien

Journey with us,

Keith Thirion

Interim Co-President



How We Fight Matters

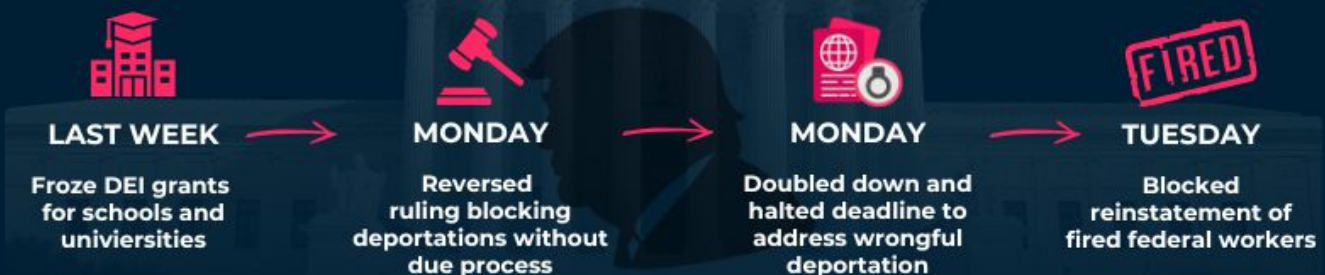
Federal Courts

Many of the lower federal courts continue to safeguard our rights and check Trump's overreach. Recently, district court [judges in New York and Texas](#) halted the deportation of certain Venezuelan plaintiffs who were dismissed under the Alien Enemies Act, ruling the administration misused this wartime power to deport alleged "gang members" without due process.

Meanwhile, Republicans in Congress are pushing to limit the courts' ability to protect Americans from Trump's draconian executive orders. The House just passed the No Rogue Rulings Act (NORRA), which would ban nation-wide injunctions. AFJ deplored the Act's passage in the House in a [recent statement](#).

At the same time, the Supreme Court's conservative majority has issued several rulings in Trump's favor — [granting Trump permission](#) to proceed with using the Alien Enemies Act for mass deportations if it can be proven that detainees were given due process; backing his [freeze](#) on Department of Education grants related to diversity, equity, and inclusion; and blocking [a lower court order](#) to reinstate thousands of federal employees who had been fired in mass layoffs.

THE SUPREME COURT'S *Shadow Moves*



While the Trump Administration has not yet announced its first slate of judicial nominees, several troubling appointees have been confirmed to critical leadership positions at the Department of Justice. AFJ documented the egregious records of these appointees by writing letters opposing [Harmeet Dhillon](#) (Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights nominee), [John Sauer](#) (Solicitor General nominee), and [Aaron Reitz](#) (Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Legal Policy nominee). AFJ also recently opposed [Brett Shumate](#) (Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Division nominee), who is likely to receive a Senate Judiciary Committee vote by the end of April. Shumate wields a troubling ultra-conservative ideology, and his confirmation would likely fetter the ability of federal agencies to function effectively and serve the public interest.

AFJ stands ready to steadfastly oppose all unqualified nominees who threaten democracy, civil rights, or the rule of law. Stay tuned for our unique in-depth research on judicial nominees, breakdowns of their impact on our rights and democracy, and how you can take action.

State Courts

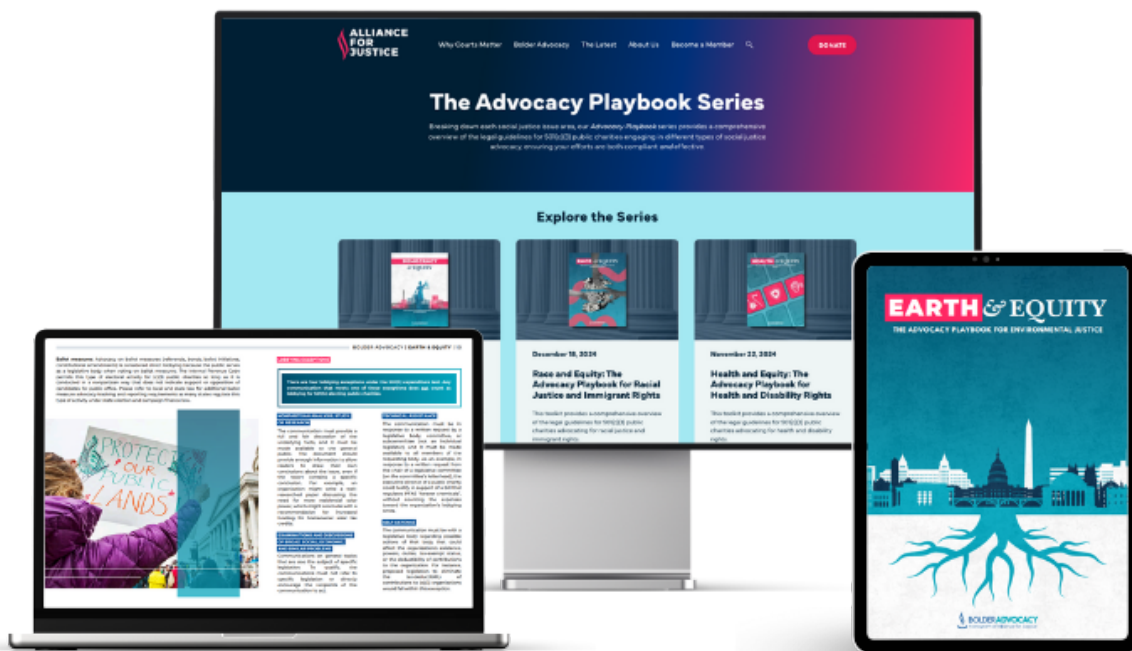
In Wisconsin, progressive-backed Judge Susan Crawford secured an early election night victory to the Wisconsin Supreme Court. The race drew national attention — billionaire Elon Musk even inserted himself into the contest, offering million-dollar rewards to select voters. Crawford, a Dane County Circuit Court judge, defeated her challenger, Waukesha County circuit judge and former Republican Attorney General Brad Schimel.

Meanwhile, the North Carolina Supreme Court delivered a partial win to Justice Allison Riggs in her fight to certify her election to the state's highest court. Riggs, a Democrat, defeated Court of Appeals Judge Jefferson Griffin, a Republican, by 734 votes. However, Griffin challenged the validity of 65,000 ballots, and litigation has continued since November. In its most recent decision, the state supreme court blocked Griffin's attempt to disenfranchise 60,000 voters and ordered those votes to be certified. The court, however, mandated that approximately 5,000 overseas and military ballots must be cured within the next 30 days. Riggs promptly filed in federal court to protect those ballots and ensure every vote is counted. A separate federal suit has also been filed on behalf of the affected voters.

Bolder Advocacy

In recent months, many nonprofits have faced dramatic funding cuts and policy decisions that threaten their communities and run counter to their missions. In response, AFJ's Bolder Advocacy team created new resources to assist nonprofit advocates as they prepare to respond to executive orders, administrative actions, and potential audits.

On our April 2 episode of the [Rules of the Game podcast](#), we launched a new social justice advocacy series to highlight how advocates working on issues like environmental justice, reproductive rights, and criminal legal reform can respond to potential threats and boldly build their power through advocacy. We'll publish a new issue-specific episode every two weeks, beginning with an episode focused on [advocacy for LGBTQ+ communities](#). We've also published timely blogs on [responding to executive orders](#) and [standing up against policy decisions](#) that are negatively impacting the nonprofit sector and the communities we serve. Our upcoming public webinar series is also focused on ensuring nonprofits are equipped to comply with relevant advocacy laws. Join us on April 29 to [learn best practices for advocacy recordkeeping](#) to enhance your organization's advocacy potential and prepare for the possibility of politically motivated attacks.





Membership & Outreach

This year, AFJ's Membership & Outreach team has continued to expand opportunities for connection, education, and support across our network of partners and member organizations. Our Membership team recently launched two exciting new offerings designed to enhance and amplify the work of our members. First, we introduced a **[“Members in the News”](#)** section on our website that uplifts media coverage of our member organizations. Additionally, we've rolled out a new member benefit: **[personalized consultations with AFJ staff](#)**. Member organizations can now book one-on-one sessions with experts from our Communications and Development teams to receive tailored guidance on everything from logo redesigns to refining fundraising strategies.

On the Outreach front, we hosted our latest Holding Court discussion on March 26, titled **[“From Visibility to Victory: Defending Trans Rights.”](#)** In recognition of Trans Day of Visibility, we were honored to be joined by Shayna Medley, Senior Litigation Staff Attorney at Advocates for Trans Equality; Meghann Burke, Executive Director of the National Women's Soccer League Players Association; and Paul Spivey (he/him), Board Member of PFLAG National.

Together, they discuss the importance of the ongoing fight for the freedom to be our authentic selves and the urgent need to protect and advance trans rights. If you missed the event or want to revisit the discussion, you can [watch the full recording here](#).

Meet Our Staff



Zack Ford

Senior Press and Editorial Communications Strategist

***Finding Harmony in Justice, Journalism,
and Showtunes***

If you've ever been moved by a bold AFJ op-ed, hooked by a sharp press release, or caught an eye-opening TikTok on courts and civil rights, chances are Zack Ford had a hand in it. As our Senior Press and Editorial Communications Strategist, Zack blends journalistic rigor with a knack for storytelling, translating complex legal issues into messages that resonate far beyond legal circles. His talent lies not just in what he writes, but in how he brings AFJ's mission to life — with clarity, conviction, and a little creative flair.

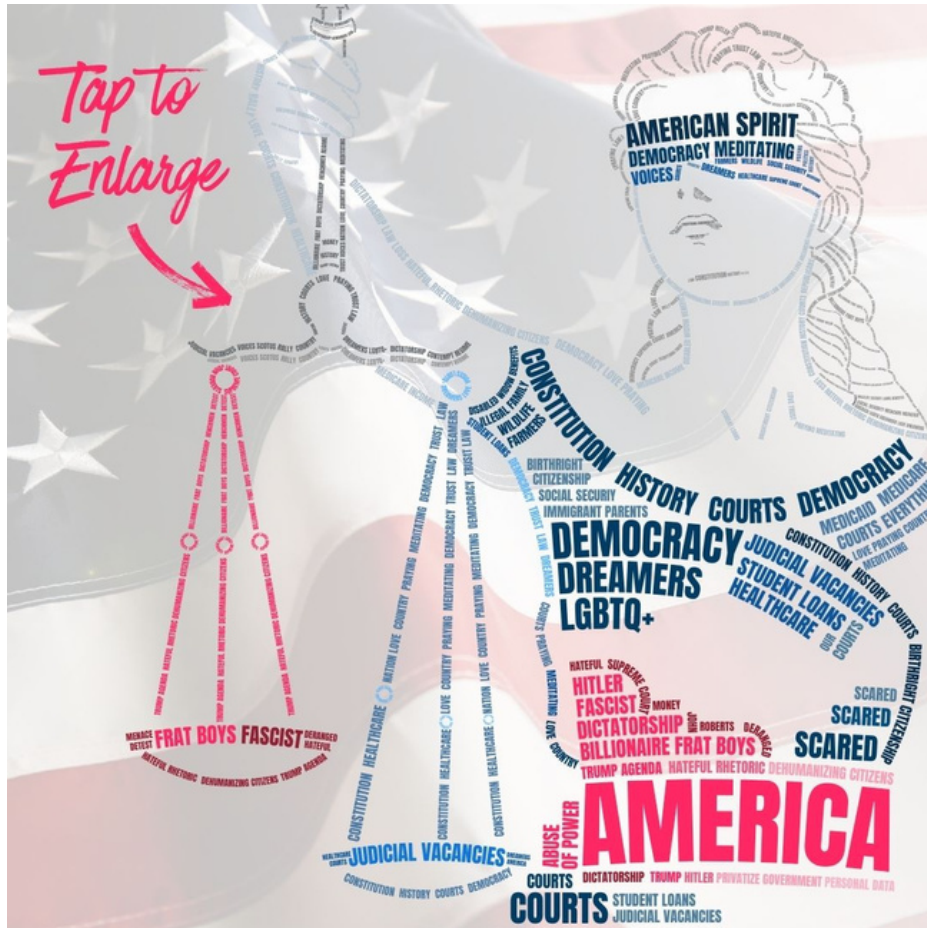
Before joining AFJ, Zack spent a decade as a respected political journalist, where he became a leading voice on LGBTQ issues and broader progressive causes. That experience sharpened his ability to dissect policy and spotlight injustice with both urgency and heart. Now, he channels those skills into ensuring AFJ's voice is heard loud and clear — from Capitol Hill to your social feed.

But Zack's magic doesn't stop at the keyboard. A trained musician and showtunes enthusiast, he moonlights as a musical director and hosts karaoke nights that are anything but ordinary. Whether he's commanding a piano bench or commanding the narrative, Zack's passion for connection, justice, and joyful expression shines through — and we're lucky to have him orchestrating AFJ's message to the world.

[**Read the full profile on Zack here.**](#)

We asked our readers (you)...

"What keeps you up at night, and what are you worried about?"



Now we'd like to ask...

"What is giving you hope right now?"
How are you fighting back?"

Take the [survey](#) today!

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Alliance for Justice
11 Dupont Circle NW
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20036
United States