

AFJ INSIDER

Welcome Rachel



Dear Friend,

Times continue to be deeply challenging, for us personally, but also, for our democracy. The chaos, the uncertainty, the daily outrage is our current reality, and it shows no sign of slowing down. Celebrating wins, no matter how large or small, or good news, in whatever form, is vital to maintaining our capacity to continue the fight. So, I am delighted, today, to invite you to celebrate with Alliance for Justice as we welcome our third President, **Rachel Rossi**, to AFJ. As AFJ's VP of Strategy and now former Interim Co-President, I am delighted to hand over the reins to Rachel. This will allow me to double down on the programmatic work of AFJ, which is growing and evolving in response to the challenges we face, rising to meet the moment. **But even more, I am thrilled that Rachel comes to us with energy, vitality, and hope to lead AFJ into the next chapter of its storied history.**

The Trump administration is flagrantly abandoning the executive branch's commitment to the rule of law, keeping the attention on Trump himself, rather than on the very real, devastating damage being inflicted on our constitutional democracy and indeed, our nation. We all were stunned when NBC's Kristen Welker asked Trump, "Don't you need to uphold the Constitution of the United States, as president?" and he responded, **"I don't know."** Stunned not just by his words, but the utter lack of outrage by the Republican party and failure to distance themselves from this blatant dereliction of sworn duty to *"support and defend the Constitution of the United States..."*

As we recommit to challenging Trump's harms every step of the way, Rachel is a leader meant for this moment, ushering in a bold new chapter in our fight for justice, equity, and democracy. From the courtroom to Capitol Hill, she has dedicated her career to not just defending our democracy but pushing us to make sure it best serves those at risk of the greatest injustices.

Her lifetime of fearless advocacy, public service, and reform-driven leadership will ensure, in turn, AFJ is at our best in this critical moment for our democracy. A trailblazer in every sense of the word, Rachel's appointment signals a powerful new era for AFJ and the progressive movement.

Rachel's joining us at this time is a moment that we must celebrate – please join us! You can sign her [welcome card](#), read our [press release](#), and learn more about Rachel in the profile below.

This will also be my last letter to start the Insider, as next month you'll hear from Rachel herself! We look forward to the many coming opportunities for you to get to know her, virtually and/or in person. In the meantime, thank you for your solidarity and energy for the fight. Your steadfast support has helped ensure our success and, indeed, accomplishments throughout this transition.



Onward,

Keith Thirion

Vice President of Strategy



*How **We Fight** Matters*

Federal Courts

This month, Trump released his first slate of judicial nominees: four to Missouri's district courts, one to the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, and one to the D.C. Superior Court. Unsurprisingly, the slate is stacked with far-right ideologues committed to rolling back civil rights and weakening the agencies that protect us all. Even more concerning: three of the five nominees for lifetime federal seats don't meet the American Bar Association's minimum 12-year experience recommendation — making them clearly unqualified. AFJ strongly opposes each of these picks and urges you to join us in blocking them:

- [**Whitney Hermandorfer**](#) (U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit): Less than 10 years' experience; dismal civil rights record; replaces Biden nominee Karla Campbell, a celebrated union-side labor lawyer whom AFJ strongly supported.
- [**Zachary Bluestone**](#) (U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri): Previously worked in Josh Hawley's Federalism Unit at the Missouri Attorney General's Office, which brought politically motivated lawsuits against progressive Obama-era policies; only nine years of experience.
- [**Maria Lanahan**](#) (U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri): Barely meets minimum qualifications per the ABA; career built attacking reproductive freedom, labor rights, and civil liberties.
- [**Judge Cristian Stevens**](#) (U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri): Currently a judge on the Missouri Eastern District Court of Appeals; troubling record on racial justice; regularly rules against workers' rights.
- [**Joshua Divine**](#) (U.S. District Court for the Eastern and Western Districts of Missouri): Currently Missouri's Solicitor General; formerly Josh Hawley's Chief Counsel; only nine years of experience; known for attacking civil rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and environmental protections.

Stay tuned for more factsheets, reports, and letters of opposition.

State Courts

The last uncertified contest from the 2024 election cycle nationwide has finally reached its conclusion, with North Carolina Court of Appeals Judge Jefferson Griffin conceding the race to incumbent North Carolina Supreme Court Justice Allison Riggs following more than six months of Griffin's efforts to disenfranchise voters and overturn the results of an election that he lost by 734 votes. The concession came after a federal court ruling that ordered the state's board of elections to certify the race. Griffin has spent the past six months challenging over 65,000 votes that were cast largely from areas of the state with high concentrations of Democratic voters. Griffin challenged the certification of the race in state court, with Riggs then challenging his attempt to disenfranchise properly cast votes in federal court. Riggs, who was previously a voting rights attorney and a court of appeals judge, will be sworn in to an eight-year term on the court.

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.

Since launching our new social justice advocacy series on our [Rules of the Game podcast](#), we've highlighted how advocates working on environmental justice, reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ rights, racial justice, and criminal legal reform can respond to potential threats and boldly build their power through advocacy. 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 May 27](#) to better understand the rules that apply to various types of foundations so you can work smarter when requesting support for advocacy.

As always, if you have questions about your nonprofit's ability to engage in advocacy and respond to government actions, our Bolder Advocacy team is here to help! Reach out to our [free technical assistance hotline](#) to connect with one of our team members. Or, check out our [on-demand webinar series](#) to learn more about the rules that apply to your lobbying, election, and other advocacy activities.



Membership & Outreach

May has already been a busy month for the AFJ Outreach and Membership team! So far we've hosted our first Midwest Academy training of 2025 and launched the first of our new AFJ member meetings — a conversation around multi-entity organizations. Thank you to the engaged and thoughtful groups who came out for these events! Read on to see what else we have in store for this month!

Join us on **Wednesday, May 28 at 1 PM ET** for our next Holding Court event: **[“The Supreme Court and Conservative Grievance”](#)** with Leah Litman, a law professor, Strict Scrutiny podcast co-host, and the author of *Lawless*. The discussion will center around Litman's latest book, **Lawless: How the Supreme Court Runs on Conservative Grievance, Fringe Theories, and Bad Vibes**. You can sign up to join the conversation [here!](#)

In case you haven't heard — AFJ member organizations can now connect directly with experts from our Communications and Development teams for customized support, whether it's reworking a logo, sharpening messaging, or strengthening fundraising plans. Sign up for a personalized one-on-one consultation with AFJ staff [here!](#)

Meet Our Staff



Meet **Rachel Rossi**, AFJ's new president — a former public defender, music major, foosball champ, and fierce advocate for democracy. From Broadway to the Biden Justice Department, Rachel's journey is anything but ordinary. Get to know the woman leading the fight for fair courts and fearless nonprofits.

[Read the full interview here.](#)

Plus, [hear from Rachel](#) in her own words.

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