



THE BENCHLINE

The Senate Judiciary Committee

Executive Nominees

This week, the Senate Judiciary Committee held nomination hearings for Todd Blanche, nominated to serve as Deputy Attorney General, and Gail Slater, who is nominated to be the next Assistant Attorney General overseeing the Department of Justice's Antitrust Division. Blanche is a Trump loyalist who defended President Trump in his 2024 New York "Hush money" criminal trial, in which he was convicted of 34 felony counts. Gail Slater is a former policy adviser to Vice President J.D. Vance.

The committee also advanced Kash Patel's nomination for consideration by the full Senate on a party-line vote. His nomination could be voted on as early as next week. With little opposition expressed from Senate Republicans, it is likely that he will be confirmed as the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. AFJ continues to **oppose** this nomination. Patel is "**profoundly unqualified**," and his incompetence, along with his fierce loyalty to Trump, will endanger the safety, security, and rights of the American people.

The Senate Judiciary Committee

Judicial Vacancies

As of now, there are 52 vacancies for Article III positions, with 48 in district courts and four in circuit courts. Many of these vacancies are in states with two Republican senators, reflecting those senators' refusal to collaborate with the Biden administration. The number of vacancies has also increased over the past month as several judges appointed by former Republican presidents have decided to take senior status, presumably gaming the timing to give Trump more judicial vacancies to fill.

When President Trump begins his nomination process, we can anticipate that his picks will likely differ significantly from those made by the Biden administration, both in terms of quality and diversity — demographically and professionally. Like his first term, his nominations will likely be dominated by corporate attorneys and prosecutors, with a strong likelihood that they will mostly be white men.

When the nomination process begins, AFJ will be ready to provide you with in-depth information on the judicial candidates and their positions on key issues.

HOLDING

THE BENCHLINE

President Trump's flurry of executive orders has dominated the news cycle. As discussions about the constitutionality of these orders unfold, the role of the federal judiciary becomes increasingly clear as a critical, and possibly one of the only, checks on this executive. This week, Judges [Montecalvo](#) and [Rikelman](#), both appointed by former President Biden, are holding the "Benchline" on the Court of Appeals for the First Circuit, where they joined in [denying](#) the Trump administration's request to block a lower court ruling. That ruling, issued by Judge John McConnell (D.R.I.), a nominee of President Obama, had previously blocked Trump's executive order to freeze federal funding. Since Trump took office, the following judges have temporarily blocked many of his most overreaching actions:

- [Judge Royce Lamberth](#) (D.D.C.), a nominee of President Reagan, ruled against an order to send transgender women to men's prisons, stating that they would likely win their case by arguing the policy was unconstitutional.
- [Judge Paul A. Engelmayer](#) (S.D.N.Y.), a nominee of President Obama, restricted Elon Musk's government efficiency program from accessing the Treasury Department's data systems, citing concerns that doing so could cause "irreparable harm."

Power, Precedent, and Pushback in Trump's Second Term

Hannah Swanson, Managing Senior Staff Attorney for **Planned Parenthood Federation of America** and **Golnaz Fakhimi**, Legal Director for **Muslim Advocates** will join us to discuss the lasting impact of Trump's judicial appointments and what a second term could mean for the future of the courts and key legal rights.

WHEN:
Tuesday
February 18
3pm ET

WHERE:
Virtual

Holding Court

Power, Precedent, and Pushback in Trump's Second Term

Alliance for Justice invites you to join us on [Tuesday, February 18, at 3 p.m. ET](#) for a virtual conversation featuring Hannah Swanson, Managing Senior Staff Attorney for Planned Parenthood Federation of America and Golnaz Fakhimi, Legal Director for Muslim Advocates. The discussion will be moderated by Keith Thirion, AFJ's co-interim president.

Our discussion will examine the impact of President Trump's first-term judicial appointments and their lasting effects on the American legal landscape. Trump's appointees have rolled back immigration reform, abortion access, LGBTQ+ rights, and more. We'll also explore what a second Trump administration could mean for judicial nominations and discuss key legal battles likely to arise from his policies, particularly in immigration, executive power, abortion access, and civil rights.

[You can register here.](#)

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