



THE BENCHLINE

Judicial Nominees

In an unprecedented attack on sitting judges, Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX), Chair of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Federal Courts, Oversight, Agency Action and Federal Rights, kicked off 2026 with a hearing calling for the impeachment of Chief Judge James Boasberg (District Court for the District of Columbia) and Judge Deborah Boardman (District of Maryland). Both were simply **doing their jobs**. Cruz's attacks align with Trump's continued threats against federal judges who rule against his administration. The judiciary is often the last line of defense we have against authoritarian overreach, and such threats undermine judicial independence and the separation of powers. As Professor Stephen Vladeck testified before the committee, this hearing was "an effort to vilify and perhaps muster support for the impeachment of two highly regarded federal district judges because some members of this Subcommittee disagree with some of their rulings."



THEY'RE NOT **LAWLESS**.
THEY'RE SIMPLY **DOING THEIR JOBS**.

Six nominees from 2025 had not yet been marked up by the Senate Judiciary Committee by the end of the year, so they were renominated by the White House at the start of 2026. Earlier this morning, all six were marked up and reported out of the Senate Judiciary Committee. They include [Megan Benton](#) (Western District of Missouri), [David Fowlkes](#) (Western District of Arkansas), [Nicholas Ganjei](#) (Southern District of Texas), [Brian Lea](#) (Western District of Tennessee), [Justin Olson](#) (Southern District of Indiana), and [Aaron Peterson](#) (District of Alaska). Benton, Ganjei, Lea, and Olson were all advanced on party-line votes, whereas Fowlkes and Peterson received bipartisan support. Thirty federal, state, and local organizations, including AFJ, went on the record [opposing Olson's nomination](#), citing his efforts to dehumanize and exclude transgender people, his bias against women and LGBTQ+ individuals, and his extreme views on reproductive justice.

Notably, [John Guard](#), previously nominated for the Middle District of Florida, was missing from the White House's renomination list. Last year, Guard's nomination stalled for months after a charity that Guard was involved in came under [criminal investigation](#) — a charity that also has links to Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis. Despite the Trump administration's determination that Guard is unfit and unqualified for a federal judge role, he remains under consideration for an opening on the Florida Supreme Court — one which will ultimately be confirmed by DeSantis.

Last week, the Senate confirmed [Alexander Van Hook](#) (Western District of Louisiana) in a bipartisan vote. Trump also announced four new federal judicial nominees on Truth Social: [Anna St. John](#) (Eastern District of Louisiana), [John Shepherd](#) (Western District of Arkansas), [Chris Wolfe](#) (Western District of Texas), and [Andrew Davis](#) (Western District of Texas). As with almost all of Trump's nominees so far in his second term, these nominees lack demographic and professional diversity, have ties to far-right groups, and may have been selected for their unfettered loyalty to Trump.

Notably, St. John serves as the President and General Counsel of the Hamilton Lincoln Law Institute, which houses the Center for Class Action Fairness. This libertarian, anti-trial lawyer, and pro-forced arbitration organization has worked for years to undermine consumer rights and corporate accountability. In 2021, St. John [testified](#) against legislation to end forced arbitration for cases involving sexual harassment and sexual assault ([EFASASHA](#)). AFJ and many other coalition partners strongly supported this legislation, which later became law. AFJ will provide more information on these nominees as we uncover it.

THE SUPREME COURT

The Supreme Court continues to undermine civil rights and further Trump's far-right agenda. On Tuesday, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments in **two cases** challenging state laws that bar transgender athletes from girls' and women's sports. The Supreme Court's decision in these cases will shape the legal status of more than two dozen anti-trans sports bans across the country. These cases reach far beyond whether transgender people can participate in sports. They will determine whether trans people are entitled to a constitutional right to equal protection under the law. This administration has regularly used anti-trans fearmongering as a wedge issue, exploiting young people in an already vulnerable group to gain power. The American Civil Liberties Union, alongside dozens of civil rights organizations, rallied outside the Supreme Court during oral argument, in a show of solidarity for the trans community and to demonstrate a broader commitment toward defending the constitutional rights of all people.

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REPUBLICAN APPOINTEES
side with the **wealthy**.



Recent data confirms what many readers have suspected — that the Supreme Court more often sides with the wealthy and the powerful over everyday people. A recent **analysis** of court decisions found that in 2022, the Court's Republican appointees sided with wealthier parties 70% of the time, a significant increase from 45% in 1953. With **35 million** people living at or below the poverty line, these findings mean that some of our most vulnerable populations will be left behind by our highest Court.

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AND NOT JUST
“WE WHO ARE WHITE,
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Even more troubling, due to decades of racist policies and practices, women and people of color experience poverty at a **significantly higher rate**. The judiciary was created to serve “We the People,” and not just “We who are white, affluent, and wealthy.” The members of our highest Court owe us at least that much.

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