



THE BENCHLINE

Judicial Nominees

Last week, the Senate confirmed six more of Trump’s judicial nominees, bringing the total number of federal judges confirmed in Trump’s second term to 33.

[Nicholas Ganjei](#) (Southern District of Texas), [Megan Benton](#) (Western District of Missouri), [Brian Lea](#) (Western District of Tennessee), and [Justin Olson](#) (Southern District of Indiana) were confirmed on party-line votes, while [David Fowlkes](#) (Western District of Arkansas), and [Aaron Peterson](#) (District of Alaska) were confirmed with bipartisan support.



JUSTIN OLSON

- 🔔 CULTURE WAR RHETORIC
- 🔔 ATTACKS ON TRANSGENDER PEOPLE
- 🔔 EXTREME ANTI-ABORTION IDEOLOGY
- 🔔 30 ORGANIZATIONS OPPOSED



NICHOLAS GANJEI

- 🔔 RIGHT-WING PARTISAN NETWORKS
- 🔔 ANTI-IMMIGRANT COMMENTARY
- 🔔 IDEOLOGICAL ACTIVISM

**FEDERAL JUDGES SHOULD PROTECT RIGHTS,
NOT TARGET THEM.**

AFJ has repeatedly highlighted the concerning records of several of these nominees, but especially Ganjei and Olson. Thirty organizations went on the record to **oppose Olson's nomination**, as he consistently **dehumanized** transgender people, made **misogynistic** remarks when teaching Sunday School, and promoted extreme anti-abortion viewpoints. Hoosiers deserve better than a nominee like Olson. AFJ also released a short video highlighting Ganjei's **extensive** ties to highly partisan, right-wing organizations and his consistent anti-immigrant rhetoric and commentary. This conduct proves why he's unfit for a lifetime position on the federal judiciary.

Last Wednesday, the Senate judiciary committee held a hearing for Trump's ninth slate of judicial nominees: **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). In the hearing, Senator Durbin **asked** St. John about her stance on forced arbitration, highlighting the fact that she had **testified** against bipartisan legislation to end forced arbitration for cases that involving sexual harassment and sexual assault. Instead of acknowledging her previous testimony, St. John blatantly lied, suggesting that she had not testified against ending forced arbitration. St. John's answer is especially egregious considering her entire career she has stood as a proponent for forced arbitration and has actively worked against consumer rights and corporate accountability. **National** and **local** news outlets highlighted Durbin's questioning, as well as AFJ Action's blog post co-authored by former Fox News journalist Gretchen Carlson, which discussed St. John's previous testimony.



HOLDING

THE BENCHLINE

As the Trump administration remains focused on implementing its extreme agenda through illegal maneuvers and brute force, the courts continue to act as one of the few avenues available to stop or slow the damage. This time, the judiciary **halted** the administration's efforts to illegally impede offshore wind development, an important environmental investment. Judge Royce Lamberth of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia issued a preliminary injunction which would allow for the developer of a New York wind project, known as Sunrise Wind, to carry on with its construction efforts as legal battles between the administration and the developer take place. Late last year, the Interior Department had ordered all work on Sunrise Wind and other East Coast wind farms to halt, arguing that the projects were a threat to national security. But Judge Lamberth was unpersuaded by these arguments, finding instead that the Department's action caused irreparable harm to the developer. This case follows four other recent rulings, all of which have allowed ongoing wind projects to continue across the United States.

As previously mentioned in the last Benchline, Minnesota Chief U.S. District Judge Patrick Schiltz summoned acting ICE Director Todd Lyons to court over his agency's unlawful detainment of a petitioner before Schiltz's court. Because of the pressure Schiltz applied to the agency, ICE released the **petitioner** the following day. Although this overdue release caused Schiltz to withdraw his summons, he still castigated the agency over its **repeated** refusals to comply with a litany of court orders. In a January 28 court **order**, Schiltz stated that "ICE has likely violated more court orders in January 2026 than some federal agencies have violated in their entire existence."

**“ICE HAS LIKELY
VIOLATED MORE COURT
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ENTIRE EXISTENCE.”**

CHIEF U.S. DISTRICT JUDGE PATRICK SCHILTZ

Schiltz's bravery in the face of the Trump administration's brazen disregard for the law has inspired some of his colleagues to take similar stands. Fellow Minnesota U.S. District Judge John Tunheim **blocked** ICE's efforts to target thousands of legal refugees residing in Minnesota. Tunheim issued an emergency order demanding that the administration **release** the refugees it had in custody and return them to Minnesota.

Given Trump's increasingly overt march toward authoritarianism, it is encouraging to see the federal judiciary emphatically and effectively push back against the administration's worst abuses.

Holding Court

Last week, AFJ President Rachel Rossi moderated a virtual panel titled, "Holding Court: The Endangered Lawyer" featuring **Congresswoman Maggie Goodlander** (D-NH); Brett Dixon, Vice President of the Law Society; Todd A. Cox, Associate Director Counsel, Legal Defense Fund (LDF); and Seth Frotman, Senior Fellow at the Berkeley Center for Consumer Law and Economic Justice and Towards Justice. An international coalition of 53 lawyers' groups designated the United States as the focus country for 2026's International Day of the Endangered Lawyer, following previous designations to countries that include Iran, Belarus, and Afghanistan. Such a designation stems from the belief that the U.S. now exhibits notable patterns of authoritarianism. The panel discussed recent attacks on lawyers, judges, and the judicial system as a whole. Panelists also shared lessons learned from previous attacks in other justice movements around the world. You can watch the discussion **[here](#)**.

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