

On September 14, 2026, President Trump nominated Samuel Dawson Adkisson to a lifetime seat on the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee. Adkisson graduated from Yale Law School in 2018 — a mere eight years before his nomination — far below even the bare minimum 12 years of experience recommended by the American Bar Association. Adkisson has even fewer years of litigation experience: He spent three years clerking and a year working as White House counsel and special assistant to Trump. The remaining four years of Adkisson's private practice experience appears to be ideologically-driven work largely to further far-right agendas. Despite this shockingly thin resume, and perhaps because he fits into the pattern of loyalist nominees, Trump has nominated Adkisson for a federal trial court position that gives him the power to entrench his biases and extremist values for decades.

Adkisson's record as an ideological operative began at Yale Law School, where he ran the Federalist Society chapter, aggressively pressured the administration to hire right-wing faculty, and deemed the organization important to the future of the American legal system. Under his leadership, the chapter weaponized its platform to honor Robert Bork and host Leonard Leo, Trump's chief judicial architect. Leo engineered the Supreme Court's current 6–3 right-wing supermajority, which has systematically stripped away abortion access, dismantled fair elections, and crippled equitable education. Adkisson openly celebrated this legacy. Immediately after law school, Adkisson joined hyper-partisan law firms to execute this ideological agenda. At Consovoy McCarthy and Cooper & Kirk, he specialized in high-stakes litigation designed to suppress abortion-related speech protections. Yet, despite his rapid elevation by political patrons, Adkisson personally tried only one case to judgment and never once faced a jury.

Adkisson quickly parlayed his outside advocacy into an inside role shaping the federal bench. As associate counsel in the Trump White House, he was directly responsible for identifying, vetting and installing far-right judicial nominees. Now, just eight years out of law school, Adkisson is using that exact political insider track to cash in on a lifetime federal judgeship for himself.

LACKS SIGNIFICANT TRIAL EXPERIENCE

Federal district judges are trial judges, yet Adkisson is demanding a lifetime seat on a federal trial court despite never trying a single case before a jury. His Senate Judiciary Questionnaire exposes the vacuum of his experience: His only trial to judgment was a corporate bankruptcy dispute where he sat as a junior associate. He claims "active support" in the Harvard affirmative action case but admits he did not even enter a formal appearance.

LACKS SIGNIFICANT TRIAL EXPERIENCE (CONT.)

This record fails to meet even the minimum standard benchmark set by the American Bar Association (ABA) Standing Committee on the Federal Judiciary, which “believes that a nominee to the federal bench ordinarily should have at least twelve years’ experience in the practice of law” and “substantial courtroom and trial experience as a lawyer or trial judge.”

Adkisson fails on both counts, having graduated only in 2018 and lacking substantial courtroom and trial experience. If confirmed, Adkisson would immediately wield significant control over civil and criminal trials, evidentiary rulings, jury management, and criminal sentencing. Because Article III judges receive lifetime tenure, the communities of eastern Tennessee would be trapped with his total lack of courtroom experience for decades.

SUPPORTED EFFORTS TO BLOCK ABORTION CLINIC ACCESS

Because federal trial judges hold the power to rule on reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ equality, and racial discrimination, Adkisson’s hostile and ideologically driven record on civil rights demands an immediate rejection of his nomination.

At Consovoy McCarthy, Adkisson went to war against reproductive freedom, working on Supreme Court litigation to strike down Chicago’s “bubble zone” ordinance, which protected patients outside abortion clinics from aggressive harassment. Representing extremist anti-abortion groups, his litigation directly urged the Supreme Court to wipe out decades of established precedent protecting clinic access. Later, acting as outside counsel for Florida, he drafted the state’s brief to block emergency legal protection for an advocacy group targeted by the state for running ads in support of a 2024 abortion-rights ballot initiative.

WEAPONIZED RELIGIOUS LIBERTY TO ATTACK LGBTQ+ RIGHTS

Adkisson has similarly targeted LGBTQ+ individuals. In a 2019 op-ed, he attacked Yale Law School’s basic nondiscrimination policy, which barred anti-LGBTQ+ employers from using school resources. Adkisson reframed the right to exclude people based on “gender identity” as a matter of faith, shielding anti-LGBTQ+ groups under the guise of “religious liberty”. He also publicly defended Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) attorney [and now president] Kristen Waggoner, downplaying the group’s notorious anti-LGBTQ+ record. ADF has pursued this agenda through strategic litigation and advocacy aimed at limiting LGBTQ+ equality, including supporting the recriminalization of consensual same-sex activity and defending laws abroad requiring the sterilization of transgender people. Over the years, the organization has increasingly framed challenges to LGBTQ+ nondiscrimination protections as matters of “religious freedom” — the same framing Adkisson employed in attacking Yale’s nondiscrimination policy.

WORKED TO DISMANTLE CIVIL RIGHTS PROTECTIONS

Dismantling civil rights protections has been the cornerstone of Adkisson's entire career. Beyond his behind-the-scenes work to end affirmative action at Harvard, he engineered a proposed class-action lawsuit against the University of Oklahoma, claiming the university discriminated against white students through race-conscious financial aid — a legal stunt fiercely condemned by civil rights organizations like the ACLU. He also litigated claims alleging the Federal Aviation Administration's hiring process discriminated against white applicants. In a documentary entitled "Corporate DEI Is Now a Recipe for Lawsuits," Adkisson openly attacked diversity initiatives, warning American corporations that pursuing equity would expose them to "massive liability."

CONCLUSION

Anyone confirmed for a lifetime role on the federal judiciary must demonstrate a commitment to fairness, independence, and equal justice for all. Alliance for Justice believes Adkisson's record raises serious concerns regarding those principles. He graduated from law school only eight years before his nomination, has personally tried only one case to judgment, and has never tried a jury case. His legal work has included challenges involving abortion-clinic protections, LGBTQ+ nondiscrimination requirements, and race-conscious programs before serving a political agenda in the Trump White House.

His remarkably thin record proves he lacks the experience, impartiality, and dedication to equal justice required for a lifetime seat on the federal bench. For these reasons, Adkisson remains fundamentally unfit and unqualified to serve as a federal district court judge.