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Leaders Urge Senate to Abandon Rules Change

Leading civil rights organizations and fair courts experts hosted a telephone press briefing today to discuss Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's brazen partisan power grab in his latest attempt to change the rules on debate time for nominees who would serve on our federal courts for decades to come. Experts discussed the Senate Republicans' willingness to break any rules necessary to fill our courts with anti-civil rights judges, no matter the harm it will bring American communities.

The audio recording of this call can be found [here](#).

Associate Director-Counsel at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) Janai Nelson's full remarks can be found [here](#).

"All nominees for lifetime positions deserve thorough and complete vetting," said **Janai Nelson, Associate Director-Counsel at LDF**. "Some of the Administration's most egregious picks for the courts, like Thomas Farr, have been stopped because of concerns that were unearthed in this critical final debate period. This move will diminish each Senator's opportunity to sufficiently vet candidates for the federal bench, effectively obliterating the constitutional obligation to 'advise and consent' on judicial nominees."

"While the president nominates people to the courts, senators have an independent role to carefully vet and consider those nominees. Leader McConnell and Senate Republicans are consolidating their power and breaking the rules to speed up the process," said **Kristine Lucius, Executive Vice President of Policy at The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights**. "Our civil and human rights are at stake when biased nominees hide

their records and are rushed through to confirmation. Senators must reject McConnell's ploy to rig the system and transform our federal courts."

"Let's not kid ourselves: no one in the universe has less standing than Mitch McConnell to complain about obstructing judicial nominees," said **Marge Baker, Executive Vice President at People For the American Way**. "But when you look at the facts, this isn't about obstruction; this is about McConnell wanting to get as many narrow-minded elitists on the bench as he can before his power trip ends. But just because you can do something, doesn't mean that you should or that it's the right thing to do. Nominees like Michael Truncale have made clear that, given the chance, they'd use a lifetime seat on the federal bench to undermine voting rights, attack reproductive choice, perpetuate insidious systemic racism, and threaten the rights to LGBTQ people."

"This administration's attempt to pack the federal judiciary with dangerous anti-LGBT ideologues threatens the safety and well-being of LGBT people and everyone living with HIV for generations to come," said **Sharon M. McGowan, Chief Strategy Officer and Legal Director at Lambda Legal**. "Howard Nielson and Matthew Kacsmayk's history of anti-LGBT advocacy should be disqualifying to anyone who cares about the fairness and integrity of the federal judiciary, and yet it appears as though these aspects of their record are precisely what helped secure them these nominations for lifetime appointments to the bench. The lengths to which Senate Majority Leader McConnell is willing to go in order to confirm extreme judges like these demonstrates just how determined this administration is to undermine the legal rights and protections that the LGBT community has only recently secured."

"This President has shown he has no respect for the courts unless they serve his political ends and his bigoted agenda," said **Harper Jean Tobin, Director of Policy at the National Center for Transgender Equality**. "That's why he nominates men like Jeff Mateer who call transgender children "proof that Satan's plan is working," and like Matthew Kacsmayk who calls transgender people "a delusion" and their deeply held identities "pretend." This rule change will create a kangaroo confirmation process for dozens of unvetted ideologues who millions of Americans could never trust to be unbiased."

"Trump has already forced through a record number of judicial nominees, and now they're trying to change the rules to jam through even more," said **Cecelia Thomas, Legislative Manager at Planned Parenthood Federation of America**. "Senate Republicans are trying to speed up the process for anti-abortion nominees like Wendy Vitter, who will decide on our health and rights for a lifetime. Wendy Vitter has a long record of opposing reproductive health and rights, which puts her far outside of mainstream American values. People support health care, birth control, and protecting access to safe, legal abortion. The Trump-Pence administration is attempting to remake an entire branch of government by filling lifetime judicial appointments with unfit, ideologically driven people — such as Wendy Vitter. This is as part of Trump and Pence's broader agenda to restrict and overturn women's health and rights for generations to come."

"It is no surprise that Republicans are committed to unilaterally changing the rules to minimize debate, scrutiny, and transparency surrounding the individuals they are confirming to the federal bench. They know that if their constituents knew who they were

voting for, they would be outraged,” said **Daniel Goldberg, Legal Director of Alliance for Justice**. “Patrick Wyrick is just such a nominee. He has just two years of judicial experience in Oklahoma. Moreover importantly, though, he has ties to one of the most ethically compromised officials in the United States, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, and he himself has a long record of anti-environmental positions. In fact, the nomination of Patrick Wyrick for a seat on a federal district court in Oklahoma fits right in with the Trump Administration’s established pattern of nominating ethically compromised individuals to powerful government positions.”

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Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation’s first civil and human rights law organization and has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.

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The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights is a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States. The Leadership Conference works toward an America as good as its ideals. For more information on The Leadership Conference and its member organizations, visit www.civilrights.org.

People For the American Way is a progressive advocacy organization founded to fight right-wing extremism and defend constitutional values including free expression, religious liberty, equal justice under the law, and the right to meaningfully participate in our democracy.

Lambda Legal is a national organization committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people and everyone living with HIV through impact litigation, education and public policy work.

The National Center for Transgender Equality is a national social justice organization based in Washington, DC. NCTE is devoted to ending discrimination and violence against transgender people through education and advocacy on national issues of importance to transgender people.

Planned Parenthood Action Fund is an independent, nonpartisan, not-for-profit membership organization formed as the advocacy and political arm of Planned Parenthood Federation of America. The Action Fund engages in educational, advocacy and electoral activity, including grassroots organizing, legislative advocacy, and voter education.

Alliance for Justice believes that all Americans have the right to secure justice in the courts and to have their voices heard when government makes decisions that affect their lives. We

are a national association of 130 organizations, representing a broad array of groups committed to progressive values and the creation of an equitable, just, and free society.