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Social Issues: Crime, Immigration, and Reproductive Rights



Photo by US House of Representatives, via Wikipedia.

US Representative Elise Stefanik spoke about the pro-life movement on the one-year anniversary of the passage of Dobbs.

New Supreme Court Justice Addresses Her Historic Confirmation

By Ketanji Brown Jackson

Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, the first African American woman to serve on the US Supreme Court, was nominated to the court by President Joe Biden and confirmed in June of 2022. Jackson was born in Washington, DC, and is a graduate of Harvard University where she was an editor of Harvard Law Review. In this speech, she speaks about her historic nomination and experiences as a woman of color in the US legal system.

Joe Biden: Now, folks, it's my honor, and it truly is an honor. I've been looking forward to it for a while, to introduce you the next Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court, the Honorable Ketanji Brown Jackson.

Ketanji Brown Jackson: Thank you. Thank you all. Thank you all very much. Thank you. Thank you so much, Mr. President. It is the greatest honor of my life to be here with you at this moment, standing before my wonderful family, many of my close friends, your distinguished staff and guests, and the American people. Over these past few weeks, you've heard a lot from me and about me. So I hope to use this time primarily to do something that I have not had sufficient time to do, which is to extend my heartfelt thanks to the many, many people who have helped me as part of this incredible journey. I have quite a few people to thank, and as I'm sure you can imagine, in this moment, it is hard to find the words to express the depth of my gratitude.

First, as always, I have to give thanks to God for delivering me as promised and for sustaining me throughout this nomination and confirmation process. As I said at the outset, I have come this far by faith, and I know that I am truly blessed. To the many people who have lifted me up in prayers since the nomination, thank you. I am very grateful. Thank you as well, Mr. President, for believing in me and for honoring me with this extraordinary chance to serve our country. Thank you also, Madam Vice President, for your wise counsel and steady guidance. And thank you to the First Lady and the Second Gentleman for the care and warmth that you have shown me and my family. I would also like to extend my thanks to each member of the Senate. You have fulfilled the important constitutional role of providing advice and consent under the leadership of Majority Leader Schumer, and I'm especially grateful for the work of the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee under Chairman Durbin's skillful leadership.

Delivered on April 8, 2022 at the White House, Washington, DC.

As you may have heard during the confirmation process, I had the distinct honor of having 95 personal meetings with 97 sitting senators, and we had substantive and engaging conversations about my approach to judging and about the role of judges in the constitutional system we all love. As a brief aside, I will note that these are subjects about which I care deeply. I have dedicated my career to public service because I love this country and our constitution and the rights that make us free. I also understand from my many years of practice as a legal advocate, as a trial judge, and as a judge on a court of appeals, that part of the genius of the constitutional framework of the United States is its design and that the framers entrusted the judicial branch with the crucial but limited role.

I've also spent the better part of the past decade hearing thousands of cases and writing hundreds of opinions. And in every instance, I have done my level best to stay in my lane and to reach a result that is consistent with my understanding of the law and with the obligation to rule independently, without fear or favor. I am humbled and honored to continue in this fashion as an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, working with brilliant colleagues, supporting and defending the constitution, and steadfastly upholding the rule of law.

But today at this podium, my mission is far more modest. I'm simply here to give my heartfelt thanks to the categories of folks who are largely responsible for me being here at this moment. First, of course, there is my family. Mom and Dad, thank you, not only for traveling back here on what seems like a moment's notice, but for everything you've done and continue to do for me. My brother Ketajh is here as well. You've always been an inspiration to me as a model of public service and bravery, and I thank you for that. I love you all very much. To my in-laws, Pamela and Gardner Jackson, who are here today, and my sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law, William and Dana, Gardie and Natalie, thank you for your love and support.

To my daughters, Talia and Leila, I bet you never thought you'd get to skip school by spending a day at the White House. This is all pretty exciting for me as well, but nothing has brought me greater joy than being your mother. I love you very much. Patrick, thank you for everything you've done for me over these past 25 years of our marriage. You've done everything to support and encourage me, and it is you who've made this moment possible. Your steadfast love gave me the courage to move in this direction. I don't know that I believed you when you said that I could do this, but now I do. And for that, I'm forever grateful. In the family category, let me also briefly mention the huge extended family, both Patrick's and my own, who are watching this from all over the country in the world. Thank you for supporting me. I hope to be able to connect with you personally in the coming weeks and months.

Moving on briefly to the second category, people that warrant special recognition, those who've provided invaluable support to me professionally in the decades prior to my nomination and the many, many friends I have been privileged to make throughout my life and career. Now I know that everyone who finds professional success thinks they have the best mentors, but I truly do. I had three inspiring jurists for whom I had the privilege of clerking, Judge Patti Saris, Judge Bruce Selya, and of course, Justice Steven Breyer. Each of them is an exceptional public servant,

and I could not have had better role models for thoughtfulness, integrity, honor, and principle, both by word and deed.

My clerkship with Justice Breyer in particular was an extraordinary gift and one for which I've only become more grateful with each passing year. Justice Breyer's commitment to an independent, impartial judiciary is unflagging. And for him, the rule of law is not nearly a duty. It is his passion. I am daunted by the prospect of having to follow in his footsteps, and I would count myself lucky indeed to be able to do so with even the smallest amount of his wisdom, grace, and joy. The exceptional mentorship of the judges for whom I clerked has proven especially significant for me during this past decade of my service as a federal judge. And of course, that service itself has been a unique opportunity. For that, I must also thank President Obama who put his faith in me by nominating me to my first judicial role on the federal district court.

This brings me to my colleagues and staff of the federal district court in Washington, DC and the DC Circuit. Thank you for everything. I am deeply grateful for your wisdom and your battle-tested friendship through the years. I also want to extend a special thanks to all of my law clerks, many of whom are here today, who have carved out time and space to accompany me on this professional journey. I'm especially grateful to Jennifer Gruda, who has been by my side since nearly the outset of my time on the bench and has promised not to leave me as we take this last big step.

To the many other friends that I have had the great, good fortune to have made throughout the years, from my neighborhood growing up from Miami Palmetto Senior High School and especially the debate team—

Kamala Harris: Right.

Ketanji Brown Jackson: ... from my days at Harvard College, where I met my indefatigable and beloved roommates, Lisa Fairfax, Nina Coleman Simmons, and Antoinette Sequeira Coakley, they are truly my sisters. To my time at Harvard Law School and the many professional experiences that I've been blessed to have since graduation, thank you. I have too many friends to name, but please know how much you've meant to me and how much I have appreciated the smiles, the hugs, and the many "atta, girls" that have propelled me forward to this day.

Finally, I'd like to give special thanks to the White House staff and the special assistants who provided invaluable assistance in helping me to navigate the confirmation process. My trusted sherpa, Senator Doug Jones, was an absolute godsend. He was an absolute godsend. He's not only the best storyteller you'd ever want to meet, but also unbelievably popular on the Hill, which helped a lot. I'm also standing here today in no small part due to the hard work of the brilliant folks who interact with the legislature and other stakeholders on behalf of the White House, including Louisa Terrell, Reema Dodin, and Tona Boyd, Minyon Moore, Ben LaBolt, and Andrew Bates.

I am also particularly grateful for the awe-inspiring leadership of White House Counsel Dana Remus, of Paige Herwig, where's Paige, and Ron Klain. They led an

extraordinarily talented team of White House staffers in the Herculean effort that was required to ensure that I was well prepared for the rigors of this process and in record time. Thank you all. Thank you as well to the many, many kindhearted people from all over this country and around the world who have reached out to me directly in recent weeks with messages of support. I have spent years toiling away in the relative solitude of my chambers with just my law clerks in isolation. So it's been somewhat overwhelming, in a good way, to recently be flooded with thousands of notes and cards and photos expressing just how much this moment means to so many people.

The notes that I've received from children are particularly cute and especially meaningful because more than anything, they speak directly to the hope and promise of America. It has taken 232 years and 115 prior appointments for a Black woman to be selected to serve on the Supreme Court of the United States. But we've made it. We've made it, all of us, all of us. And our children are telling me that they see now, more than ever, that here in America, anything is possible.

Kamala Harris: That's right.

Ketanji Brown Jackson: They also tell me that I'm a role model, which I take both as an opportunity and as a huge responsibility. I am feeling up to the task primarily because I know that I am not alone. I am standing on the shoulders of my own role models, generations of Americans who never had anything close to this kind of opportunity but who got up every day and went to work believing in the promise of America, showing others through their determination and, yes, their perseverance that good, good things can be done in this great country, from my grandparents on both sides who had only a grade school education but instilled in my parents, the importance of learning, to my parents who went to racially segregated schools growing up and were the first in their families to have the chance to go to college.

I am also ever buoyed by the leadership of generations past who helped to light the way, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Justice Thurgood Marshall, and my personal heroine, Judge Constance Baker Motley. They and so many others did the heavy lifting that made this day possible. And for all of the talk of this historic nomination and now confirmation, I think of them as the true path breakers. I am just the very lucky first inheritor of the dream of liberty and justice for all. To be sure, I have worked hard to get to this point in my career, and I have now achieved something far beyond anything my grandparents could have possibly ever imagined. But no one does this on their own. The path was cleared for me so that I might rise to this occasion.

And in the poetic words of Dr. Maya Angelou, I do so now while bringing the gifts my ancestors gave. I am the dream and the hope of the slave. So as I take on this new role, I strongly believe that this is a moment in which all Americans can take great pride. We have come a long way toward perfecting our union. In my family, it took just one generation to go from segregation to the Supreme Court of the United States. And it is an honor, the honor of a lifetime, for me to have this chance

to join the Court, to promote the rule of law at the highest level, and to do my part to carry our shared project of democracy and equal justice under law forward into the future. Thank you again, Mr. President and members of the Senate for this incredible honor.

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