



**Statement of Vanita Gupta
President and CEO
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights**

**Forum on
“The Importance of Diversity of the Federal Judiciary”**

Congressional Black Caucus

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Congresswoman Norton and members of the Congressional Black Caucus: I am Vanita Gupta, president & CEO of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. The Leadership Conference is a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States. Founded in 1950 by A. Philip Randolph, Arnold Aronson, and Roy Wilkins, The Leadership Conference works in support of policies that further the goal of equality under law through legislative advocacy and public education.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the importance of ensuring that our federal judiciary reflects the diversity that makes America strong. I want to thank so many of you for your leadership and, in particular, I'd like to thank Congresswoman Norton for organizing this forum.

Today's topic is among the most important ones we currently face. As one of the three co-equal branches of our government, the federal courts make decisions every single day that impact our lives. Federal judges play a critical role in protecting our democracy and ensuring that our civil rights can be enforced. From our voting rights, to our educational opportunities, to the safety and fairness of our workplaces, to the quality of the air we breathe, the federal judiciary is designed to be the independent guardian of our rights and freedoms.

All people in America deserve to have a justice system that lives up to its name. And yet, right now, President Trump is trying to take over the federal courts by nominating young extremists who are either unqualified or unfit to serve impartially – or both. Trump and his morally bankrupt agenda are failing in court. Rather than changing his agenda, he's trying to remake the courts in his own image.

His nominees are also the least diverse set of judicial nominees in decades. More than 91 percent of his nominees are White and nearly 77 percent are men. President Trump has only nominated *two* women of color. In fact, Trump has replaced at least 10 of Obama's nominees of color with White nominees.



Bringing diverse experiences and perspectives to the bench allows judges to make better informed decisions and increases public confidence in our justice system.

The story of the Eastern District of North Carolina is a terrible example of these dynamics. President Obama nominated two distinguished African-American women – Jennifer May-Parker and then Patricia Timmons-Goodson – to fill a seat that has now been vacant for more than *12 years*. It is the oldest judicial vacancy in America. Each nominee would have been the first African-American and second woman to serve on that court. But North Carolina’s Republican senators prevented them from getting a hearing or committee vote, and the seat remained vacant. President Trump has nominated Thomas Farr to fill this vacancy – a man who worked with Jesse Helms to suppress the Black vote in North Carolina and withheld information about his role from the Senate Judiciary Committee.

On top of all this, Chairman Grassley and Leader McConnell are trying to eliminate the longstanding practices that allow the Senate to be an effective check on the president – the same practices they used to block Obama’s highly qualified, diverse nominees. And they’re doing that in a rush to replace them with dangerous, unqualified, and dangerously unqualified nominees.

The civil rights community is determined to stop as many of these unfit nominees as we can. Last month, together, we stopped three of them – Brett Talley, Jeffrey Mateer, and Matthew Petersen. Despite a Republican majority determined to rush through as many unqualified nominees as they can, we cracked their armor.

And since we’ve done it before, we know how we can do it again. These nominations failed because folks stood up and spoke out. We made it clear that Senate Republicans couldn’t push through these unqualified and biased nominees without anyone noticing.

Yesterday, Trump renominated nearly all of the individuals sent back from the Senate. In this moment, we must build on the momentum we gained last month and keep pushing to expose more nominees who have earned their nominations by their hostility to our civil and human rights.

Our democracy needs independent and fair judges who not only respect the rule of law but also reflect the communities they serve. When the president nominates individuals with long records of bias and bigotry, we must all stand up and fight for the integrity of our courts and the progress that we’ve made as a nation.

I am grateful to be a part of this discussion today to shine a light on the president’s attempt to take over the federal courts and remake them in his own image. More people need to understand the real and present danger that his plan presents.