



October 11, 2019

Ms. Erin Burnett, CNN
Mr. Anderson Cooper, CNN
30 Hudson Yards
New York, NY 10001-2151

Mr. Marc Lacey, The New York Times
242 W 41st St
New York, NY 10036

Attn: October 15 Democratic debate moderators and producers:

On behalf of People For the American Way, a national organization of 1.5 million members dedicated to fighting right-wing extremism and building a democratic society that implements the ideals of freedom, equality, opportunity and justice for all, we urge you to address the issue of the importance of the federal courts at the upcoming Democratic debate on October 15 in Westerville, Ohio. This debate provides a critical opportunity to ask the candidates what they would do to repair the damage President Trump and his fellow Republicans have done to the courts—especially the Supreme Court.

In 2016, Mitch McConnell blockaded Merrick Garland’s nomination for more than half a year in order to prevent President Obama from having a third nominee to the Supreme Court. The result is that we got Justice Neil Gorsuch instead. And when Justice Kennedy retired, we saw Republicans engage in [one of the most corrupt confirmation processes imaginable](#) to get Brett Kavanaugh onto the Court. Both the president and Sen. McConnell’s reelection campaigns are selling T-shirts bragging that they are “[Back-to-Back Supreme Court Champs](#).”

Meanwhile on the lower courts, after spending eight years engaged in unprecedented obstruction to keep as many seats open as possible, Republicans have gone into overdrive to ram Trump’s unqualified nominees through the Senate confirmation process. They are confirming narrow-minded elitists set on carrying out the conservative movement’s longtime goals, which include:

- overturning the New Deal;
- opening the floodgate of corporate money into politics;
- rolling back the clock on rulings that protect people who have been historically disadvantaged;
- giving corporations even more power over employees and consumers;
- dismantling protections for church-state separation;
- eliminating abortion rights; and
- enshrining second-class status for LGBTQ+ people into the law.

President Trump has placed a staggering total of 43 judges on our circuit courts thus far, nearly 25% of all active circuit judges. And as detailed in our [Confirmed Judges, Confirmed Fears](#) series, these judges are doing more and more harm to our rights and liberties.

Any agenda enacted by the next Democratic president is at grave risk of being destroyed by conservative extremists on the federal courts.

This has to end. Democratic voters want fair-minded constitutionalists on the bench who can be trusted not to put the interests of the powerful over the rest of us. Our nation needs judges and justices who understand the impact of the law on all people, not just people who are privileged. Our democracy depends on having judges who value equality and justice for all.

We need to know how the Democratic candidates plan to make that happen. What qualities will they look for in a potential Supreme Court justice or lower court judge? How will they restore balance to a judiciary that has been so damaged in the Trump years?

This is an issue that impacts every part of every candidate's agenda, and it warrants significant attention during the campaign. We urge you to address this issue at next week's debate, and thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Keegan', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael Keegan
President