



## Judicial Nominations Educational Materials Sermon Starters

- “Tzedek, Tzedek Tirdof” or “Justice Justice You Shall Pursue” (Deuteronomy 16:20) is a common refrain in Reform congregations across the country. It is a guiding principle for much of our direct action and community service and it informs our advocacy. But, are we truly doing everything we can to pursue justice?
- Part of our responsibility in attempting to fulfill the commandment of “Tzedek, Tzedek Tirdof” (Deuteronomy 16:20) is to engage with the Judicial Branch of the United States government and help to create a just system of justice.
- The majority of Americans are not terribly familiar with the functioning and/or personnel of the Judicial Branch. We don’t think of ourselves as able to impact their decisions and, further, we don’t think of ourselves as affected by these decisions.
- The Judicial Branch has the power to both secure and erode fundamental rights. It has an impact on nearly every issue that the Reform Movement cares about, from reproductive rights to civil rights, from pay discrimination to gun control, from the environment to the separation of church and state.
- The Reform Movement takes positions on these issues (and more) and fights to pass legislation that will help to implement these policy positions. At the same time, we work to build a judiciary that protects these fundamental rights that our Movement supports.
- The best way to impact the judiciary is to participate in battles over judicial nominations. Sitting out these fights jeopardizes the progress that we have made and will continue to make in the legislative arena.
- For years, particularly during the Warren and Burger Era (1953-1986), the Supreme Court decided numerous landmark cases defending—and sometimes expanding—our fundamental liberties enshrined in the Bill of Rights. In contrast, The Roberts Court has dealt serious blows to the rights of individuals, including the rights to demand remuneration for pay discrimination, to challenge Executive Branch spending, and to choose whether and how to abort a pregnancy. It has also upset settled precedent and limited access to its doors.
- The Religious Action Center, the Union for Reform Judaism’s Washington office, engages with the Judicial Branch as part of their advocacy every day. But, you can help.
  - First and foremost, stay informed. Read newspaper articles about the judiciary and learn about nominees to the Federal Bench (including District and Appellate Courts). You can always contact the RAC for resources.

- o Once you have decided how you feel about a nominee, you can share your thoughts with elected officials
    - Contact your state's Senators
    - Contact members of the Senate Judiciary Committee
  - o Consider the Courts when you vote. You elect the President and the Senate and they, in turn, decide who serves in our judiciary.
- This is not a partisan issue. Many of the Supreme Court Justices that our Movement champions as protectors of fundamental rights (e.g. Warren Burger, Sandra Day O'Connor) were appointed by Republican Presidents. The defeat of more conservative nominees has played a key role in shaping the politics that resulted in more centrist appointments to the Court. For better or worse, the same dynamic drove President Clinton's nominees more to the middle than was the case with some of his Democratic predecessors. And, it should be noted that every campaign that defeated a Supreme Court nominee had bipartisan support in the Senate.
- Now is the time to act. The 8 years of the Bush Administration had a major impact on the Courts. President Bush appointed nearly 30% of the federal bench, packing it with younger, more staunchly conservative, white, male, judges. With the election of Barack Obama to be the next President of the United States, we feel confident that the rightward shift of the Courts will end. But, if we wish to truly make progress in restoring balance and justice to the Courts, we must be prepared for battles over nominees and a probable Supreme Court vacancy.

**Other texts:**

"You shall not render an unfair decision; do not favor the poor or show deference to the rich; judge your kinsman fairly" (Leviticus 19:15)

"You shall not judge unfairly: you shall show no partiality; you shall not take bribes, for bribes blind the eyes of the discerning and upset the plea of the just." (Deuteronomy 16:19-20)

If you would like any further information, please contact Jessica Weiser, Program Associate for Judicial Nominations at the Religious Action Center, at 202.387.2800 or [jweiser@rac.org](mailto:jweiser@rac.org).