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August 7, 2023

Law School News

A More Perfect Union Through a Diverse Judiciary

Read Dean Gregory W. Bowman's August 5, 2023 editorial encouraging diversity in the nomination of Rhode Island's next federal judge.

August 7, 2023

Gregory W. Bowman



The Preamble to the U.S. Constitution is one of the most important written passages in American history. It starts like this: 'We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union' These fifteen words have served as an aspirational guidepost for generations of Americans who have strived for an ever more perfect union.

The preamble also embodies the belief that our government should and must be by the people and for the people, and it movingly acknowledges that while our government is not perfect (and may never be), perfection is an ideal worth striving for.

These are core tenets of American democracy.

Today, while much of our country is riven by racial injustice and intolerance — threatening to create a less perfect union — in Rhode Island we have an important opportunity to follow the ideals of the preamble by increasing the diversity of our federal judiciary, thereby advancing equity and representation for Rhode Islanders. U.S. District Court Judge William Smith — a jurist who has served our country and our state for many years with distinction — recently informed President Biden that he will take senior status, which means that an active federal district (trial) court judicial seat needs to be filled in Rhode Island.

Filling this judiciary vacancy with a talented and diverse jurist of color would both honor Judge Smith's legacy of service and make our state's federal judiciary more representative of the diverse population it serves. It would make Rhode Island's strong federal bench even better.

The United States' success under the Constitution has hinged in many respects on our collective ability and willingness to ensure that our three co-equal branches of government — executive, legislative and judicial — represent and reflect the country they serve.

A government that does not look like, reflect and understand the people it governs is inevitably less inclusive, legitimate and effective.

That presents a risk to American democracy and the rule of law. The appointment of diverse federal judges helps ensure that our federal courts reflect the people they serve, and this in turn helps lead to more fair and effective justice.

Diversity on the bench also works to increase the credibility of our courts and their decisions — which in turn strengthens the rule of law and promotes peace and prosperity.

In addition, judicial diversity provides diverse public role models for future generations of lawyers and leaders, which further enhances diversity and inclusivity in the judiciary and broader legal profession. Historically, Rhode Island has had little diversity in its state and federal courts. In recent years, however, diversity in the state judiciary has increased — and many of these diverse state court judges are Roger Williams University School of Law alumni.

The appointment of talented diverse jurists has improved the diversity of Rhode Island's state's judiciary, to the greater benefit of everyone in the state. The same process should occur in our federal courts. So now, 235 years after the U.S. Constitution was ratified in 1788, I hope a diverse jurist of color will be nominated, confirmed and appointed to the U.S. District Court for the District of Rhode Island. If we use this moment in history to make Rhode Island's federal judiciary more diverse, more inclusive and more representative of the people it serves, we can take a meaningful step in the ongoing process of forming our country's more perfect union.

Gregory Bowman has served as dean of Roger Williams University School of Law since 2020.

Providence Journal Op-Ed 8/5/23