

Judge Barrett Speaks, Cutting Through Noise of Protesters and Doubters

Everybody's been talking about her: Democrats, Republicans and even protesters overflowing with assumptions. On Monday, Judge Amy Coney Barrett shared her own thoughts, her own story during her opening statement to the Senate Judiciary Committee and the world—for 12 1/2 uninterrupted minutes.

In her statement, she thanked President Donald J. Trump for entrusting her with “this profound responsibility as well as for the graciousness that he and the first lady have shown my family throughout this process.”

She spoke of her husband, Jesse, their seven children—some of whom were in the room with their aunts and uncles. Of her parents, watching remotely, she said: “My parents modeled for me and my six siblings a life of service, principle, faith and love.

“I remember preparing for a grade school spelling bee against a boy in my class and to boost my confidence, my dad saying, ‘anything boys can do, girls can do better.’ And at least as I remember it, I spelled my way to victory. I received similar encouragement from the devoted teachers at St. Mary's Dominican, my all-girls high school in New Orleans.

“When I went to college, it never occurred to me that anyone would consider girls less capable than boys. My freshman year, I took a literature class filled with upperclassmen English majors. And when I did my first presentation, which was on *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, I feared I had failed, but my professor took the time to talk to me. She filled me with confidence about how well I had done and she became a mentor. And when I graduated with a degree in English, she gave me

Truman Capote's collected works as a gift.

"Although I considered graduate studies in English, I decided that my passion for words was better suited to deciphering statutes than novels. I was fortunate to have wonderful legal mentors. In particular, the judges for whom I clerked.

Mentors and the Law

"The legendary Judge Lawrence Silverman of the D.C. Circuit gave me my first job in the law, and he continues to teach me today. He was by my side during my 7th C hearing. He swore me in at my investiture, and he's cheering me on from his living room right now. I also clerked for Justice Scalia, and like many law students, I felt like I knew that justice before I ever met him because I had read so many of his colorful, accessible opinions. More than the style of his writing though, it was the content of Justice Scalia's reasoning that shaped me.

"His judicial philosophy was straightforward. A judge must apply the law as it is written, not as she wishes it were," she said. "Sometimes that approach meant reaching results that he did not like, but as he put it in one of his best-known opinions, that is what it means to say that we have a government of laws and not of men."

Barrett went on to speak of her commitment to maintaining a balanced life and not letting the law consume her, something she learned from Justice Scalia. She applies that perspective to the role of courts.

"Courts have a vital responsibility to the rule of law, which is critical to a free society, but courts are not designed to solve every problem or right every wrong in our public life. The policy decisions and value judgments of government must be made by the political branches, elected by and accountable to the people. The public should not expect courts to do so and courts should not try. That is the approach that I have

strived to follow as a judge on the 7th Circuit. In every case, I have carefully considered the arguments presented by the parties, discussed the issues with my colleagues on the court and done my utmost to reach the result required by the law whatever my own preferences might be.

“I try to remain mindful that while my court decides thousands of cases a year, each case is the most important one to the litigants involved. After all, cases are not like statutes, which are often named for their authors. Cases are named for the parties who stand to gain or lose in the real world often through their liberty or livelihood.

“When I write an opinion resolving a case, I read every word from the perspective of the losing party. I ask myself how I would view the decision if one of my children was the party that I was ruling against. Even though I would not like the result, would I understand that the decision was fairly reasoned and grounded in law. That is the standard that I set for myself in every case. And it is the standard that I will follow so long as I am a judge on any court.

Responsibility Over Ambition

“When the president offered me this nomination, I was deeply honored, but it was not a position I had sought out, and I thought carefully before accepting. The confirmation process and the work of serving on the court, if confirmed, requires sacrifices, particularly from my family.

“I chose to accept the nomination because I believe deeply in the rule of law and the place of the Supreme Court in our nation. I believe Americans of all backgrounds deserve an independent Supreme Court that interprets our constitution and laws as they are written. And I believe I can serve my country by playing that role.

“I come before this committee with humility about the responsibility that I have been asked to undertake and with

appreciation for those who have come before me. I was nine years old when Sandra Day O'Connor became the first woman to sit in this seat. She was a model of grace and dignity throughout her distinguished tenure on the court. When I was 21 years old and just beginning my career, Ruth Bader Ginsburg sat in the seat. She told the committee, 'What has become of me could only happen in America.' I have been nominated to fill Justice Ginsburg's seat, but no one will ever take her place. I will be forever grateful for the path she marked and the life she led.

"If confirmed, it would be the honor of a lifetime to serve alongside the chief justice and seven associate justices. I admire them all and would consider each a valued colleague, and I might bring a few new perspectives to the bench. As the president noted, when he announced my nomination, I would be the first mother of school-age children to serve on the court. And I know that it would make Senators Young and Braun happy to know that I would be the first justice to join the court from the 7th Circuit in 45 years. I would be the only sitting justice who didn't attend school at Harvard or Yale, but I am confident that Notre Dame could hold its own, and maybe I could even teach them a thing or two about football.

"As a final note, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the many Americans from all walks of life who have reached out with messages of support over the course of my nomination. I believe in the power of prayer, and it has been uplifting to hear that so many people are praying for me."

Watch the video of Barrett's remarks here:

was used for the transcription of Judge Barrett's statement.