



Strickland Blasts Portman's Refusal to Consider President Obama's Supreme Court Nominee

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April 13, 2016

The president's town hall Thursday afternoon at the University of Chicago Law School represented the latest Democratic push for Senate hearings and a vote on Merrick Garland, the president's Supreme Court nominee, whom he tapped last month.

Judge Merrick Garland, President Barack Obama's choice to replace the late Justice Antonin Scalia on the Supreme Court, meets with Sen.

Among the 14 GOP senators willing to meet with the Justice, three are members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, which would oversee the confirmation hearings.

But Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., and Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, are refusing to hold hearings or votes on Garland's nomination.

Obama may try to make Republicans bleed at the ballot box over their refusal to consider Garland, but he is unlikely to do enough political damage to break their resistance to a confirmation vote before the November election. Obama will also take questions from a crowd of about 250 law school students and faculty members.

"It is perfectly acceptable for Republicans to decide, even though Merrick Garland is highly qualified, even though he's indisputably a good and fair judge", not to vote for him, Obama said.

By all accounts, Obama has appointed a diverse field of judicial nominees, naming more women, people of color and LGBT people than any of his predecessors.

The president stressed that his approach to diversity is not for "publicity, just checking a box and saying, 'Look, I appointed this person or that person in any particular slot'".

Senate Republicans said they will not budge from their position, with McConnell calling Obama's assertion the Constitution requires the Senate to consider any nominee a "politically convenient fairy tale". The Illinois senator even shared a handwritten letter from Obama on Thursday thanking him his "fair and responsible treatment" of Garland.

"Yeah, he's a white guy, but he's a really outstanding jurist".

"The justices themselves have gotten political", Grassley said on the Senate floor. But in a signal that Democrats might already be thinking about an alternative plan, Durbin said there were other legislative maneuvers that "we are actively considering" and that a determination on how to proceed could emerge in the coming weeks.

"Today, there is no principle and no norm in the judicial nominations process that either side would not violate *itself* and simultaneously demand the other side observe as a matter of decency and inter-branch comity", Estrada wrote in a piece with former Washington Post editorial writer Benjamin Wittes.

US President Barack Obama waves after arriving to address the people of Cuba at the El Gran Teatro de Havana, Cuba, 22 March. "I don't know that many federal judges have asked to meet with me, but I don't think I would ever say no. So I think it's a courtesy that should be extended".

What was most striking about the memo was what it lacked - specifically, any reference to the bitter partisan fight that has led lawmakers like Senator John Boozman, Republican of Arkansas, to defend themselves against charges of betrayal for simply agreeing to sit down with Judge Garland.

Roger Pilon, vice president for legal affairs for the Cato Institute, a libertarian research group, said the fact that Obama's opposition did not come in an election year, like this one, made the actions worse. But fissures are no doubt appearing as senators face unhappy constituents back home who widely support giving Garland a vote.