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**Ketanji Brown Jackson confirmed as first Black female U.S. Supreme Court justice**

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff

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The Senate confirmed Ketanji Brown Jackson to the U.S. Supreme Court on April 7. Jackson's confirmation shattered a historic barrier by securing her place as the first Black female justice.

Jackson is a 51-year-old appeals court judge with nine years of experience on the federal court. Cheers rang out in the Senate chamber as she was confirmed with 53 votes in favor of her confirmation, and 47 against, with votes mostly along party lines but with three Republican (GOP) votes. Presiding and emotionally announcing the vote was Vice President Kamala Harris. She is also the first Black woman to reach that high office.

**"This Is A Wonderful Day, A Joyous Day"**

"This is a wonderful day, a joyous day, an inspiring day — for the Senate, for the Supreme Court and for the United States of America," exulted Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer. The Senate's upper galleries were almost full for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic two years ago, and about a dozen House members, part of the Congressional Black Caucus, stood at the back of the chamber.

Jackson will take her seat on the court when Justice Stephen Breyer retires this summer, solidifying the liberal wing of the 6-3 conservative-dominated court. She joined President Joe Biden at the White House to watch the vote, embracing as it came in.

During the four days of Senate hearings in March, Jackson spoke of her parents' struggles through racial segregation and said her "path was clearer" than theirs as a Black American after the enactment of civil rights laws. She attended Harvard University. She has served as a public defender, worked at a private law firm and was appointed as a member of the U.S. Sentencing Commission.

She told senators she would apply the law "without fear or favor." She pushed back on Republican attempts to portray her as too lenient on criminals she had sentenced.

**Jackson Will Be Third Black Justice**

Jackson will be just the third Black justice, after Thurgood Marshall and Clarence Thomas, and the sixth woman. She will join three other women, Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan and Amy Coney Barrett. This will mean that four of the nine justices will be women for the first time in history.

Jackson won't change the balance of the court, since she will be replacing Breyer, however, she will secure a legacy on the court for Biden and fulfill his 2020 campaign promise to nominate the first Black female justice.

Despite the efforts to tarnish her record, Jackson eventually won three Republican votes. The final tally was far from the overwhelming bipartisan confirmations for Breyer and other justices in decades past, but it was still a significant bipartisan accomplishment for Biden in the 50-50 split Senate after Republican senators aggressively worked to paint Jackson as too liberal and soft on crime.

**GOP Senators Break Ranks**

Senators Susan Collins of Maine, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Mitt Romney of Utah were the three Republican senators who voted in favor of Jackson. They all said the same thing: they might not always agree with Jackson, but they found her to be enormously well qualified for the job.

Biden said from the day of Breyer's retirement announcement in January that he wanted support from both parties for his history-making nominee.

Once sworn in, Jackson will be the second-youngest member of the court after Barrett, who is 50 years old. She will join a court on which no one is yet 75 years old, the first time that has happened in nearly 30 years.

Jackson's first term will be marked by cases involving race, both in college admissions and voting rights.

Judith Browne Dianis, executive director the Advancement Project, a civil rights organization, said Jackson's confirmation will make the court more reflective of communities that are most impacted by the judiciary.

"The highest court in the land now will have a firsthand perspective of how the law impacts communities of color — via voting rights, police misconduct, abortion access, housing discrimination or the criminal legal system, among other issues," she said. "This will ultimately benefit all Americans."

**Republicans Were Critical Of Jackson**

Republicans spent the confirmation hearings strongly questioning her sentencing record, which they argued were too light. Jackson declared that "nothing could be further from the truth" and explained her reasoning in detail. Democrats said she was in line with other judges in her decisions.

The Republican questioning in the Judiciary Committee showed the views of many Republicans, though, including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who said in a floor speech on April 6 that Jackson "never got tough once in this area."

Democrats criticized the Republicans' questioning.

"You could try and create a straw man here, but it does not hold," said New Jersey Senator Cory Booker earlier in the week of April 7.

In an impassioned moment during the hearings in March, Booker, who is Black, told Jackson that he felt emotional watching her testify. He said he saw "my ancestors and yours" in her image.

"But don't worry, my sister," Booker said. "Don't worry. God has got you. And how do I know that? Because you're here, and I know what it's taken for you to sit in that seat."

**Questions:**

* **Using evidence from the text, explain why this Supreme Court nomination was so historic.**
* **Who were the three Republican senators who voted to confirm Judge Jackson and why were their votes so controversial?**
* **Judge Jackson has been called one of the most qualified justices to ever sit on the Supreme Court. Using evidence from the text, explain what her qualifications are.**
* **From reading this article, explain what you have learned about the Supreme Court confirmation process.**
* **Why is the Supreme Court nomination and confirmation process such a big deal in the United States?**