

NBC's *Today*

03/21/22

7:01:18 a.m. [TEASE]

17 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Breaking Overnight; ]

SAVANNAH GUTHRIE: And on Capitol Hill this morning, hearings begin for the historic nomination of Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, the first Black woman tapped for the court.

SENATOR BEN SASSE (R-NE) [on *Fox News Sunday*, 03/20/22]: I want us to vet Judge Jackson's judicial philosophy. I don't want to attack her as a human.

GUTHRIE: Just ahead, the questions she's expected to face and her path to confirmation.

(...)

7:03:24 a.m. [TEASE]

11 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Happening *Today*; The Week Ahead; Today-Thu: Supreme Court]

GUTHRIE: Also getting underway today, the confirmation hearing for Ketanji Brown Jackson, President Biden's nominee for the Supreme Court. Opening statements coming later this morning and NBC News will bring you that coverage live.

(...)

7:13:37 a.m.

4 minutes and 59 seconds

HODA KOTB: It's going to be a big week in Washington.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Breaking News; Justice Clarence Thomas Hospitalized]

CRAIG MELVIN: Historic, Savannah, Hoda, good morning. Good morning to you as well. Confirmation hearings start this morning for President Biden's Supreme Court nominee Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson. If confirmed, she becomes the first ever African American woman to sit on the high court. Democrats hoping to steer her confirmation through by Easter. We have two reports on this Monday morning from Washington, starting with NBC's Garrett Haake on Capitol Hill. Garrett, good morning.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Breaking News; Supreme Court Confirmation Hearings]

GARRETT HAAKE: Hey, Craig. Good morning. Yeah, with a lifetime appointment on the line,

Judge Jackson will spend up to 12 hours a day in this room over the next three days answering questions from a panel evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans. It's a legal and political gauntlet that could be her last job interview ever. This morning as Washington gears up for history-making Supreme Court confirmation hearings, current Justice Clarence Thomas hospitalized over the weekend with flu-like symptoms.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Breaking News; Justice Clarence Thomas Hospitalized]

The Court saying Thomas has an infection and is being treated with intravenous antibiotics, but expects to be released in the next few days. It comes as all eyes are on Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson as confirmation hearings begin today.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Breaking News; Supreme Court Confirmation Hearings]

If confirmed, Jackson would become the first African American woman ever to serve on the nation's highest court. Today the committee's 22 Senators and Judge Jackson will each give opening statements followed by two long days of questions. A process Jackson knows well.

SENATOR DICK DURBIN (D-IL) [on ABC's *This Week*, 03/20/22]: Judge Jackson has been scrutinized more than any person I can think of. This is her fourth time before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

HAAKE: Democrats hoping to highlight the qualification of President Biden's first Supreme Court nominee, Harvard educated, nine years as a federal judge, and experience as a public defender while Republicans on the committee have been pouring over Judge Jackson's record for clues as to how she would rule as Justice Jackson. Some raising concerns about what they claim are overly lenient sentences in child predator cases.

SENATOR JOSH HAWLEY (R-MO) [on FNC's *Hannity*, 03/17/22]: She's consistently given them lenient sentences, slaps on the wrist.

HAAKE: Judge Jackson's allies disputing those claims in what could be a preview of contentious hearing days to come.

SENATOR MAZIE HIRONO (D-HI) [on MSNBC's *The Sunday Show*, 03/20/22]: They're still trying to figure out how to go after Judge Jackson, so the fact that she has empathy is a problem for a party that lacks it.

HAAKE: Democrats hoping an impressive series of hearings could win over Republican lawmakers. But, as the process gets underway today, none are showing their cards.

SASSE [on *Fox News Sunday*, 03/20/22]: I want us to vet Judge Jackson's judicial philosophy. I don't want us to attack her as a human.

HAAKE: And in the evenly divided Senate, Judge Jackson could be confirmed just with

Democratic votes and Vice President Kamala Harris breaking the tie, Craig.

MELVIN: Garrett Haake in the room where it will happen. Garrett, thank you.

GUTHRIE: Well, for more on the politics at play here, let's bring in NBC's chief White House correspondent Kristen Welker. Kristen, good morning. We've heard some potential lines of attack from Republicans along the law enforcement line. How is Judge Jackson and the White House preparing for that?

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: White House Preps Supreme Court Nominee]

KRISTEN WELKER: Hi, Savannah. Good morning. Well, Judge Jackson has been preparing for this moment for weeks, we are told, including running mock hearings led by the White House counsel's office. She also went for a walk through of the hearing room on Saturday. Now, officials say she is bracing for tough questions on everything from her position on abortion rights to affirmative action and even the push by some Democrats to put more justices on the bench. Now, her background will be under scrutiny as well, specifically her time as a public defender and the fact that she served for less than a year on the D.C. Circuit Court. No, as Garrett noted, some Republicans are signaling they'll paint her as soft on crime. The White House has already been forcefully pushing back on that, noting she earned the endorsement of major law enforcement organizations and it's also worth noting one of her introducers today is Judge Thomas Griffith. He's a well known conservative jurist and it really underscores the White House's strategy to present her as a bipartisan pick.

GUTHRIE: Some have said, Kristen, maybe this isn't going to be as contentious as prior hearings. For one thing, it's not going to change the ideological balance of the Court, perhaps the stakes are a bit lower, but it's a Supreme Court fight. They're always high. What are you looking for as this plays out?

WELKER: Yeah, it's a good question. There could be a few fireworks, Savannah, at the hearings because there are a number of potential 2024 presidential hopefuls who sit on the Judiciary Committee, including Senators Ted Cruz, Tom Cotton, and Josh Hawley, who you just saw in Garrett's piece, so these are ones to watch. Now, these types of hearings are traditionally a chance for Senators with higher aspirations to highlight their biggest issues. Still, the White House does feel confident Judge Jackson will be confirmed. And, of course, as you just mentioned, she will replace liberal Justice Breyer and would not change the ideological balance of the Court. But, the question is also, Savannah, if there are some contentious exchanges, will the President get the political bounce he is looking for from this historic pick with the midterms looming very large, Savannah.

GUTHRIE: Alright, Kristen, thank you. And, of course, NBC News will bring live coverage of this week's confirmation hearings starting a bit later this morning.