

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UH Law Center Professor Renee Knake Jefferson says Biden's commitment to put women in positions of power is unprecedented

HOUSTON – July 15, 2020 - University of Houston Law Center Professor Renee Knake Jefferson said that Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden's pledges to nominate a woman vice president and if elected, an African-American woman to the U.S. Supreme Court is a first-of-its-kind pledge made in the history of American politics.

"Although women have been considered in the past for high office, the reality is that few have ever been selected," Knake Jefferson said. "This same dynamic plays out in positions of leadership and power beyond political office too. Women are equally qualified, and have been for decades, but are unequally represented."

In her [book](#) "SHORTLISTED: Women in the Shadows of the Supreme Court" (New York University Press, May 2020), Knake Jefferson and co-author Hannah Brenner Johnson examine the personal and professional lives of nine women who were considered, and ultimately passed over, for seats on the Supreme Court before Sandra Day O'Connor became the first.

Few realize that women were considered for the nation's highest court dating back to the 1930's. O'Connor's historic appointment was in 1981. The book has been called "fascinating" by Linda Greenhouse, New York Times Supreme Court columnist, and "an important addition to the literature about the Supreme Court, the process of nominating justices, and the role of gender," by Erwin Chemerinsky, dean of the University of California, Berkeley School of Law.

"Women, and especially minority women, are significantly underrepresented in positions of power and leadership across all sectors even though they have the same qualifications as men in these roles," Knake Jefferson said. "One way to address this is for women to hold prominent, national positions like the vice presidency or the presidency itself. Visibility matters."

Knake Jefferson holds the Joanne and Larry Doherty Chair in Legal Ethics and is director of Law Center Outcomes and Assessments. She earned her Juris Doctor degree at the University of Chicago Law School, and teaches constitutional law, professional responsibility, and a seminar on gender, power, law & leadership at the Law Center. She was awarded the Fulbright Distinguished Chair in Entrepreneurship and Innovation at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University from January-July 2019. She is an elected member of the American Law Institute, and chair of the American Association of Law Schools Section on Professional Responsibility.

In December 2019, Knake Jefferson was appointed to the Michigan State Board of Trustees, as the university recovers from a sex abuse scandal involving a gymnastics team doctor that resulted in criminal charges, top level resignations, a federal fine of \$4.5 million for failing to report and address the abuse claims, and a \$500 million civil settlement with abused young women.

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