Trump and Roberts: U.S. President Donald Trump is pictured during a news conference at the

President Donald Trump, during a news conference at the White House in Washington Feb. 24, 2025, and Chief Justice John Roberts, attending Trump's inauguration ceremonies in the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol in Washington Jan. 20. (OSV News/Carl Court, and Chip Somodevilla pool via Reuters)

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Chief Justice John Roberts issued a rare public statement March 18 rebuking President Donald Trump's call to impeach a federal judge who ruled against his administration in a case concerning deportations.

"For more than two centuries, it has been established that impeachment is not an appropriate response to disagreement concerning a judicial decision. The normal appellate review process exists for that purpose," Roberts said in a statement.

Bradley Joondeph, a professor at Jesuit-run Santa Clara University School of Law whose areas of study include federalism and judicial behavior, told OSV News, "It is very unusual for a chief justice of the United States to push back publicly against another branch of government," outside of their judicial role, such as written opinions in cases.

"So it's a remarkable moment, I think, in our constitutional history, that the chief justice feels the need to do so," he said.

Robert’s statement came shortly after Trump called for impeaching U.S. District Judge James Boasberg, who blocked the administration's plans to deport people allegedly associated with a Venezuelan gang under the Alien Enemies Act of 1798. Those plans were condemned by the Catholic Legal Immigration Network Inc., also known as CLINIC, who expressed concern about due process.

Trump sharply criticized Boasberg for the ruling, calling for his impeachment.

Judicial threats raise concerns

The sister of Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett was recently targeted with a bomb threat, law enforcement officials said, shedding light on growing concern about threats to members of the judiciary and their families.

Mary Graw Leary, a professor at The Catholic University of America Columbus School of Law and a former federal prosecutor, told OSV News “the judiciary is specifically designed not to be political and specifically designed to be independent, and is often the last check on the other two branches of government.”

“So there’s an added dimension when someone is trying to get a court to do something not based on the facts and evidence in front of them, which is their job, but based on something else, is a particular concern when it’s the judiciary because that is often the last backstop,” she said.

The Charleston Police Department said it received an emailed bomb threat earlier in March concerning Amanda Coney Williams, Barrett’s sister, who resides in that South Carolina city. Police responded to her residence and determined it was a false alarm.

In a post on his social media website Truth Social, Trump wrote, “This Radical Left Lunatic of a Judge, a troublemaker and agitator who was sadly appointed by Barack Hussein Obama, was not elected President – He didn’t WIN the popular VOTE (by a lot!), he didn’t WIN ALL SEVEN SWING STATES, he didn’t WIN 2,750 to 525 Counties, HE DIDN’T WIN ANYTHING!” adding, “This judge, like many of the Crooked Judges’ I am forced to appear before, should be IMPEACHED!!!

The statement marks perhaps Roberts' most public criticism of Trump since 2018, when he similarly defended federal judges who ruled against Trump from the president's ire.

"We do not have Obama judges or Trump judges, Bush judges or Clinton judges," Roberts said in a statement at the time. "What we have is an extraordinary group of dedicated judges doing their level best to do equal right to those appearing before them. That independent judiciary is something we should all be thankful for."

Since the legal dispute over the Alien Enemies Act might ultimately end up before the Supreme Court, Roberts may have taken the opportunity to "get out in front of it to some degree" before he would review the case itself.

"This particular issue of impeaching federal judges based purely on disagreement with their rulings," may have been seen by Roberts as the right moment to weigh in without "threatening the impartiality of the court," Joondeph said.

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"So reaching out proactively to comment on this impeachment question is a good vehicle for him to make a statement," he said.

Joondeph said he is "deeply concerned" about how the second Trump administration has thus far approached dealing with the judiciary.

"There's nothing analogous in my lifetime," he said.

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. View the full series.