

Few lawyers have fought harder, smarter, and more effectively to protect women's rights in America than Ms. Rikelman. On the bench, I am confident she will serve with excellence to uphold the Constitution.

Appointments to the circuit court are essential. The lion's share of all Federal cases are decided at the circuit court level, so it is necessary these vacancies are swiftly filled with exceptional nominees like Ms. Rikelman.

This week, the Senate will also advance the nomination of Natasha Merle to be a district judge in the Eastern District of New York. With Ms. Merle's confirmation, the Senate will reach a major milestone: 100 district judges confirmed by Senate Democrats under President Biden.

Many of these 100 judges have knocked down longstanding barriers to the halls of justice: the first Muslim district judge, the first women of color to be district judges in Maryland and Oregon, the first openly LGBTQ judge in Puerto Rico. The list could go on and on.

District judges are an important reason why our Federal judiciary is far more balanced, far more diverse, and far more experienced than the one we just had a few years ago. So hitting this milestone of 100 district judges is very significant. Senate Democrats will continue moving forward on more judges in the weeks and months to come.

TAX CONVENTION WITH CHILE

Madam President, now on the Chile tax treaty, tomorrow, the Senate will vote to advance a crucial treaty impacting America's clean energy and business relationships between Chile and the United States.

A lot is at stake in our treaty with Chile, including America's global competitiveness and the future of our clean energy transition. This United States-Chile treaty is very similar to other treaties we have with more than 60 countries around the world, many of which support U.S. jobs and business growth. So I hope this treaty passes the Senate very quickly.

Chile is one corner of the so-called Lithium Triangle, home to the world's largest lithium reserves and currently the second largest lithium producer. Lithium is a key ingredient for so many important and emerging technologies, from iPhones to EV batteries to energy storage. Nations around the world, including the United States are racing to source these precious materials.

But right now, American companies are at a significant disadvantage. Because the United States doesn't have a tax treaty in place with Chile, they face double taxation and other barriers to investment and trade. Countries like China have an edge on us. It is an unnecessary roadblock to a fruitful and economically prosperous partnership between Chile and the United States.

Ratifying the Chile tax treaty would quickly remedy this issue. This treaty

has been in the works for over a decade. It now has strong bipartisan support, and now is the time to finally get it across the finish line.

I am pleased that we are finally moving the treaty forward on the floor this week. I thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle—Senators MENENDEZ and RISCH and many others—for their work.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, Senate Democrats continue to dutifully advance the Biden administration's radical nominees.

This week, the Senate will decide whether to give yet another leftwing lawyer a lifetime appointment to the Federal bench: Natasha Merle, who is an activist lawyer with a penchant for staking out extreme and inflammatory positions that are thoroughly divorced from reality. For example, she attacked widely popular election integrity measures, claiming "it's inconsistent to denounce White supremacy but not repudiate voter ID laws."

Alongside the self-proclaimed "wild-eyed leftist" Democrats just confirmed to the bench last week, Ms. Merle went after the State of Alabama for daring to verify the identities of people who cast ballots in elections. Meanwhile, Ms. Merle has found time to attack what she calls "unfounded yet repeated public assertions that there is a widespread lack of respect for law enforcement" and criticize efforts to promote law and order as "an illegal attempt to advance a false narrative that law enforcement was being attacked."

Well, Madam President, President Biden's first year in office saw the largest number of law enforcement deaths in the line of duty in 20 years. But Ms. Merle doesn't appear to like grappling with facts that don't suit her narrative. Normally, a record like this would be shockingly disqualifying, but under the Biden administration, it is not an outlier. It is an essential qualification.

Unfortunately, the President's affinity for radical nominees applies to folks already on the job as well. Last week, Democrats on the EPW Committee rammed through the nomination of Jeffery Baran to another term as Commissioner at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Mr. Baran already has an extensive record as the NRC's resident liberal obstructionist. While his colleagues collaborate on regulatory frameworks that encourage safe and efficient energy production, this

nominee prides himself on being a stick in the mud.

Even leading climate activists understand that Mr. Baran's dedication to hindering nuclear development "harm[s] the environment in the process." They know that reducing carbon emissions means embracing safe nuclear energy. Mr. Baran, however, does not.

At every opportunity, this nominee has opposed commonsense efforts to revise regulations and keep pace with the smaller and more affordable nuclear technologies of the future. He has shown that his blanket antinuclear approach is both a tired relic and an active obstruction to American prosperity.

So no wonder even some Senate Democrats are thinking twice about rubberstamping Mr. Baran's nomination. I would urge each of our colleagues to oppose it.

CHINA

Madam President, now on an entirely different matter, over the weekend, the Secretary of State traveled to Beijing and engaged senior Chinese officials, including President Xi, in meetings intended to reduce our differences. Managing and reducing tensions with America's adversaries is a typical responsibility, of course, for the Secretary of State. But this isn't necessarily an end in itself. It is a means of advancing other key interests.

Reports of the Secretary's meetings suggest Beijing blamed America for increasing tensions. Well, I certainly hope Secretary Blinken responded by holding up a mirror to the PRC.

Madam President, it is China that has increasingly threatened the people of Taiwan with military force. It is China that continues to test the limits of cyber espionage around the world. It is China that has stepped up threatening and unsafe interactions with U.S. vessels and aircraft operating legally in international waters. It is China that continues to do business with Iran, enriching the world's top state sponsor of terror. It is China that continues to provide cover for Russian aggression in Ukraine.

It is China that continues to wrongfully detain innocent foreign citizens, including Americans, while repressing its own citizens. And as just reported today, it is China that wants to build a military training facility in Cuba, 100 miles from U.S. soil.

China's conduct threatens stability across the Indo-Pacific. And it calls into question Beijing's willingness to behave responsibly, especially as the PRC rejected U.S. efforts to reestablish military-to-military communications to deescalate and prevent incidents.

These are the plain facts. One side is ramping up its provocative behavior. And this week, the Senate Armed Services Committee should reflect on Beijing's behavior as it considers the National Defense Authorization Act.

The NDAA is our primary opportunity to set Congress's national security priorities. It is a critical chance to