

The motion is agreed to.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Fred W. Slaughter, of California, to be United States District Judge for the Central District of California.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

BOLIVAR ACT

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, as the Federal Government rightfully continues to levy devastating sanctions on Russia and punish Putin and his thugs for their horrific and unlawful invasion of Ukraine, we cannot, as the Biden administration has signaled it will, choose to empower one dictator so we can punish another.

Nicoles Maduro is the illegitimate, ruthless dictator in Venezuela. I traveled to the Colombia-Venezuela border and saw the suffering of the Venezuelan people at the hand of Maduro's regime. I met with Venezuelan refugees and got updates from Colombian officials on just how bad Venezuelans were being treated by Maduro's tyranny.

Venezuelan children walk for hours through dense forests, across rivers, and over terrorist-controlled territory just to get to a school in Colombia for an education and a meal. Mothers with young children came to Cucuta to get the only meal they would eat for 3 days. I met a pregnant woman who was forced to sleep on the streets of Venezuela because she was homeless. Think about that. I am a father and a grandfather. Imagine having to look at your 3-year-old child or grandchild in the eyes and tell them that they are not going to eat today because there is no food.

The pain, the hunger, the devastation—I cannot believe any human being would do this to young children. It was heartbreaking, and it was evil. And there is one man responsible for it: Nicoles Maduro.

Since my visit, things have only gotten worse. In what is one of the worst humanitarian crises in Latin American history, more than 6 million Venezuelans have fled Maduro's oppression in Venezuela since 2014.

In 2020, a factfinding mission for the United Nations determined that Maduro's regime has engaged in crimes against humanity, including unlawful executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, and torture. The regime has imprisoned hundreds of its political opponents and forced countless more into exile. They have used the guise of the COVID-19 pandemic to further crack down on journalists and dissenters.

We know that what has been happening at the direction of Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela is horrific. That is why, in 2019, the previous administration signed an Executive order issuing a complete economic embargo on Venezuela.

We can all agree that the United States should not be bolstering such a disgusting socialist regime, and we cannot forget that any lifting of sanctions or show of appeasement toward Maduro's Venezuela will only further the suffering there and help its evil allies, like Russia, Cuba, communist China, and Iran, which actively support Maduro's abuses. So I and many others were deeply disturbed last week when we learned that President Biden secretly sent a team to Venezuela—secretly sent a team to Venezuela—and began negotiations on the potential purchase of Venezuelan oil and the easing of sanctions.

High gas prices caused by President Biden's war on American energy and Putin's invasion of Ukraine doesn't mean we can turn a blind eye to Maduro's genocide and oppression. We know that funds going to Maduro are used for terrorism in our hemisphere, and we know that Venezuela and Russia are aligned. If we support one, we support the other. That is why, just days after the American team left, the Russian Foreign Minister traveled to meet with the Venezuelan Vice President.

Now, I am glad the administration finally made the decision to stop buying Russian oil—I think it came too late—but I am glad the Biden administration reluctantly agreed not to purchase oil from Venezuela. We shouldn't be supporting Maduro or Putin. It would be foolish if we made the mistake of supporting one dictator so we could punish another dictator. Maduro has decided to be our enemy, and so is Putin. Neither of them deserves our money.

The Biden administration needs to realize that our enemies are not the world's only source of oil and natural gas. America has huge supplies of oil and natural gas, and we would have access to those resources right now if the Biden administration hadn't spent the past year relentlessly trying to destroy the U.S. oil industry.

On day 1, Biden killed the Keystone Pipeline, and 10,000—10,000—jobs alongside it were lost. Then he cut off new drilling contracts on public lands. The Biden EPA has added one ridiculous regulation after another to make it more expensive and harder for American oil manufacturers to do business. We went from being nearly energy independent and a net exporter in 2019 to begging cartels and ruthless dictators for oil. This is not American leadership, and it is not American independence.

It is long past time for the administration to admit that its ridiculous Green New Deal policies put our security at risk and hurt American families. Prices at the pump are at an all-time high across the Nation.

We should be solving this problem with our own resources and with our own workers, not with Maduro and his thugs. That is why I have introduced the Banning Operations and Leases with the Illegitimate Venezuelan Au-

thoritarian Regime Act, or the BOLIVAR Act. This bill would prohibit Federal Agencies from doing business with the oppressive Maduro regime. We can't stand by and let Maduro continue to commit genocide against his people, and we have to do everything possible to restrict the money Maduro uses to hold on to power and destabilize the region.

When I was Governor of Florida, I signed a bill that prevented State agencies from investing in companies doing business with the Government of Venezuela.

In 2019, my amendment to cut off funds to the Maduro regime was included in the National Defense Authorization Act.

In March of last year, my colleagues on the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee agreed with me, and we unanimously passed the BOLIVAR Act through our committee.

I am thankful for Senators JACKY ROSEN, MARCO RUBIO, and THOM TILLIS, who have cosponsored this legislation and helped bring this legislation this far. I also want to thank Congressman MICHAEL WALTZ for introducing the companion bipartisan bill in the House of Representatives.

But we didn't introduce the bill only to have the Biden administration begin working with Maduro's thugs and bolstering the corrupt Venezuelan oil industry. We are trying to stop that, and no one should want to be on the side of Maduro's genocide.

I am grateful for the bipartisan support this bill has received, and I hope that the entire Senate will take a stand to support the fight for freedom and the people of Venezuela.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

SUPREME COURT NOMINATION

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I rise to speak on behalf of a few Federal judge nominees from the State of California.

In recognizing that, right now, many Americans are certainly following the news and the potential news of the Federal judiciary and are focusing on a nominee for the U.S. Supreme Court. As a member of the Judiciary Committee, I certainly look forward to hearing more from Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson next week as we conduct her confirmation hearing.

The choices for the Supreme Court are certainly critical for the future of our democracy, but the fact of the matter is—and the Presiding Officer knows I like numbers and knows I like data. So the important data point here is that it is only a tiny percentage of cases in our Federal court system that actually reach the U.S. Supreme Court. In fact, more than 90 percent of the Federal cases are decided at the district court level. That means the vast majority of people who interface with the Federal judiciary will only ever meet a district court judge, sitting on the other side of the bench, whether

they are witnesses to a crime, whether they are parties to a lawsuit or defendants in a criminal case.

That is one of the primary reasons I have worked so closely with the Biden administration in helping to identify and recommend and support talented nominees for California's district courts.

Today, I rise to highlight three nominees to serve as Federal judges whose confirmation processes we are beginning today.

NOMINATION OF RUTH BERMUDEZ MONTENEGRO

Mr. President, Judge Ruth Montenegro is nominated to serve on the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California.

She is a proud daughter of Mexican immigrants who came to this country with only elementary school educations—just like my parents. Judge Montenegro understood early on—because of her parents' experience and their journey—the value of getting a good education and of public service, starting at a very young age. She was born and raised in the Imperial Valley, where she returned after graduating from UCLA Law School.

Like so many of us, you are trying to fulfill your parents' dreams, so you go on to college and get a good education. You graduate and have options all over and choose to come home to make a difference.

Judge Montenegro built a career in representing public agencies. She could have made a lot of money in the private sector. She chose to represent public agencies, ranging from the Imperial Valley Housing Authority to the El Centro Elementary School District. She has served for nearly 10 years now as a State superior court and Federal magistrate judge.

Judge Montenegro's extensive judicial experience and lifelong dedication to her community, I have no doubt, will strengthen the Southern District's bench.

NOMINATION OF FRED W. SLAUGHTER

Mr. President, next, I would like to highlight Judge Fred Slaughter, who is nominated to serve on the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California.

Judge Slaughter received his undergraduate and his law degree from UCLA, going on to a distinguished career as a prosecutor. For more than a decade, he served as an assistant U.S. attorney in Arizona, Oregon, and California, where he oversaw and tried hundreds of cases, including cases involving human trafficking, bank robberies, and the prosecuting of members of White supremacist groups.

Judge Slaughter has spent the past 8 years serving in the Orange County Superior Court. There, he is known for his compassion and leadership in juvenile justice. Judge Slaughter's long career demonstrates his legal excellence as well as his commitment to providing justice for all.

NOMINATION OF JACQUELINE SCOTT CORLEY

Mr. President, finally, Judge Jacqueline Corley is nominated to serve for the Northern District of California.

She is a native of Long Beach. She earned her bachelor's degree from UC Berkeley and her J.D. from Harvard Law School.

Judge Corley's nontraditional path to the bench displays her commitment to public service. After spending some time in private practice, she spent more than 10 years as a career law clerk for the Northern District of California. Based on her outstanding work in that role and the expertise that she built in private practice prior, Judge Corley was selected to serve as a magistrate judge for the Northern District. She has served there for the past decade and is known for her mentorship of current law clerks.

I celebrate each of these highly qualified nominees who will help Californians access justice throughout our State. When people enter a Federal court, they should feel confident in the promise of equal justice—equal justice that I know these three nominees will help deliver. The oversight and judgment of a thoughtful and fair judge is paramount.

Our democracy depends on the public's faith in the judiciary. That is why I am committed to building a bench of judges who will better reflect and understand the districts, the States, and the country that they serve. I am proud to take another step toward that goal by supporting the confirmations of these three judges, and I urge all of our colleagues to do the same.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF GEORGIA SHOOTINGS

Mr. WARNOCK. Mr. President, I rise today to reflect on a dark day in Georgia's recent history.

One year ago today, a hateful act of violence shook Metropolitan Atlanta and reverberated across our State, our country, and indeed the world. In the span of just a few hours, our sense of safety and sanctuary was pierced by bullets of hate and fear. Eight precious people lost their lives—eight people who were loved by their families, their friends, their children; eight people with their own successes and struggles, hopes, and dreams.

We speak their names: Soon Chung Park, Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha Kim, Yong Ae Yue, Delaina Ashley Yaun Gonzalez, Paul Andre Michels, Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng.

My heart aches for these Georgians and their families for whom I am sure the wounds are still fresh. They were the victims of unconscionable, senseless hate.

As a pastor, I believe in the sacred worth of every human being—that we are a strange admixture of dust and divinity, of sod and sky, of beauty and possibility.

So I will ask now for all of my colleagues and everyone who can to join me in taking a moment of silence to remember these eight Georgians and to pray, each in our own way, for their families.

(Moment of silence.)

Thank you.

VIOLENCE AGAINST ASIAN AMERICANS

Mr. President, importantly, I must mention that this unspeakable violence was visited largely upon Georgia's Asian-American community and especially on women of Asian descent. Unfortunately, this hateful act that horrified Atlanta is not isolated; it is part of a larger trend.

Last year, anti-Asian hate crimes increased 339 percent. Think about that—in 1 year, a 339-percent increase in anti-Asian hate crimes. It is a sobering statistic, and it should remind all of us of our shared duty in our democracy to stay committed to peace, an active peace, that recognizes that we are in this together.

It was Martin Niemoller, the pastor during Hitler's Third Reich, who said:

First they came for the Communists, and I did not speak . . . because I was not a Communist.

Then they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak . . . because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak . . . because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak . . . because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak. . . .

So this is a tragedy, in a real sense, visited upon all of us.

As a student of history and a voice for our State and the Senate, I know Georgians understand all too well how hate and misplaced anger can hurt our communities and how certain parts of our community are so easily scapegoated and lose their sense of sanctuary. And then when that happens, all of us lose a piece of ourselves. So I want to say to my AAPI sisters, brothers, and neighbors that I see you, and, more importantly, I will continue to stand with you against hate and violence wherever it rears its ugly head.

That is why I cosponsored and fought to pass the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act and to get it signed into law, directing more resources to ensure our communities have what they need to seek justice whenever and wherever hate and crime rear their ugly heads.

I am especially proud that my colleagues worked with me to include a provision in this legislation that names and acknowledges the pain and experiences of Georgia's AAPI community specifically and makes sure we never forget the names attached to the lives and the families we lost in the horrific shootings in Atlanta 1 year ago today.

And that is why I am pushing here in the Senate to confirm a U.S. attorney for the northern district of our State, a post that is integral to helping Georgians stop crime and pursue justice.

The terrible act of violence and hate we witnessed on March 16, 2021, ought