

States of America to project power and to protect our interests throughout the region.

It is naive to think that you can pass a resolution downgrading our status with Qatar without there being an impact on that base, our personnel there, and our ability to use that base as a means to protect our interests around the region.

Qatar is the third largest customer of U.S. defense systems in the world. There are a lot of American jobs at stake when it comes to our relationship with Qatar. And the Qataris, over and over again, respond when America is in crisis. They housed more than 70,000 Afghans during the evacuation of our forces and of Afghan allies. Almost nobody else in the world would do that. But the Qataris said yes because the United States asked them.

They are an imperfect ally. They are an imperfect ally. This is a repressive regime with a bad history on human rights and worker rights, but they are a critical ally.

But more to the point of the Senator's resolution, the Senator's main critique is that Qatar hosts Hamas, a terrorist organization. I can understand why some bristle at that notion of an ally of the United States playing host to Hamas. Qatar plays host to Hamas because they were requested to do so by the United States. Hamas established an office there because the United States asked them to do that in 2012 because we knew we needed an ability to talk to Hamas.

Qatar played a contributing role in Egypt-led negotiations to get a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas in 2014, 2019, and 2021. Why? Because we were able to talk to Hamas through their presence in Qatar.

And yes, Qatar has been a conduit to send money to Hamas. A lot of people may bristle at that notion, as well—our ally Qatar sending money to the Hamas political organization inside Gaza, as they have done for years. Qatar did that at Israel's request. Israel approved, in a security Cabinet meeting in 2018, an arrangement whereby Qatar, through their relationship with Hamas, would send money into Gaza “in coordination with security efforts to return calm [in] villages of the south, but also to prevent a humanitarian disaster” in Gaza. That was the Israeli position.

So I understand the discomfort of an ally having a relationship with Hamas. It has come at the request of the United States and at the request of Israel and is absolutely vital to protecting our ability to get hostages out.

If you want to make sure those hostages never leave, then cut off Qatar's role as an intermediary. You want to fundamentally harm U.S. interests in the region, you want to shut down our airbase, you want to eliminate the ability of Qatar to help us again when we are in need, as we were as we evacuated Afghanistan—then downgrade their status.

For those reasons, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. BUDD. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Connecticut. That was beautiful, articulate. It was a beautiful articulation of all the reasons to support my bill.

You see, this week, some of the hostages' families are in Washington to meet with leaders from all branches of government. I have met with them many, many times, and every time I come away deeply moved by the strength and resilience that they are showing in the space of an unspeakable evil.

I let them know that not only are all levels of our government working to bring their loved ones home safely, but that I would do everything in my power to make it happen. Sometimes that means being direct, even with friends like Qatar. Sometimes, that means making allies uncomfortable.

But the truth of the matter is that friends are honest with one another. So this is more than about just a bilateral relationship between two nations. This is about the well-being of U.S. citizens and a native of my home State, North Carolina.

While the Senate won't be able to pass this today because of the objection, it is my hope that we can work through the committee process to get this bill across the finish line. But, more importantly, while Qatar has done less than hoped and expected, and other allies like Egypt have thankfully stepped up to fill the unfortunate void, let this bill be a tool to move the hostage negotiations forward and secure the release of all the hostages being held in Gaza.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

JUDICIAL CONFERENCE

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, last month, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas resisted Democrats' latest attempt to intimidate the Federal judiciary.

This all started a year ago, when Senate Majority Leader SCHUMER sent a letter to the chief judge of the Northern District of Texas, urging him to change the ways that cases were assigned in that district. In short, the majority leader is unhappy with single-judge divisions in Texas that have handed down rulings that he doesn't agree with.

Well, forget for a moment the fact that the left has been more than happy to file lawsuits in courts they believe will be friendly to their arguments. Set that aside for a moment. But the majority leader seeks to avoid more liberal losses in the courtrooms. He wants the chief judge to ignore Federal law—literally, ignore the law—which establishes which courts have jurisdiction and venue over a given case. As Senator SCHUMER sees it, this change, which would create a random selection

assignment system, would prevent judges who are nominated by Republican Presidents from hearing as many high-profile cases.

Well, the majority leader might be forgiven for his naivete or his misunderstanding of actually what controls what venue and what jurisdiction is under the law, but the problem is that he went a step further. He ended his letter with a clear threat. If the Northern District didn't comply with his demands, he said, “Congress will consider more prescriptive requirements.” In other words, he said: Do what we want, and, if you don't, we will do it for you.

Well, for some reason, the Senator from New York thinks he should be the one to decide how cases are assigned in the Northern District of Texas.

Late last month, Chief Judge David Godbey wrote the majority leader a letter reminding him of something that the leader already knew, which is that assignment of cases is not governed by politics but by existing law. A Federal statute that Congress passed, signed by a President, gives district courts the authority to decide how to assign cases for a given district.

Unsurprisingly, there is no requirement that chief judges consult with the majority leader of the Senate when deciding how to assign cases within their district. There is this thing called separation of powers that the majority leader may have overlooked or forgotten about.

As Chief Justice Godbey noted in his letter, the district judges in the Northern District of Texas met to discuss this topic and reached a consensus not to make the changes requested by Senator SCHUMER.

While the chief judge of the Northern District was not swayed by the majority leader's implicit threat, that wasn't the end of the story. Regrettably, the Judicial Conference of the United States, in an effort to placate the majority leader, recommended that district courts across the country randomly assign certain cases that seek to invalidate State or Federal law. In other words, now the Judicial Conference has gotten into the act, ignoring existing laws passed by Congress and signed by Presidents that establish which courts have jurisdiction and venue over a given case.

Well, that provoked another telling reaction on the part of our Democratic colleagues. The majority leader rejoiced that this guidance that he sought would prevent “MAGA-right plaintiffs” from being able to “all but guarantee a handpicked MAGA-right judge.”

How insulting is that? These are lifetime judges nominated by a President, confirmed by the U.S. Senate, and the majority leader is suggesting that a judge who has taken an oath to uphold the Constitution and laws of the United States can be depended on to reach a predetermined result. Well, I know that is politics, but that is not

the way the laws are supposed to be interpreted or applied by the courts.

Thank goodness we have an independent judiciary in this country. It is one of the things that makes us unique in the world among democracies—a truly independent judiciary that calls balls and strikes; that interprets the Constitution and laws and applies them to a given case, even when politicians get caught up with their rhetoric and their political desires.

Well, the majority whip—the chairman of the Judiciary Committee—echoed the majority leader's position and noted that changing the way cases are assigned, he says, “will help restore the public's trust in our court system and strengthen our democracy.”

I think what undermines the public's trust in our court system and undermines our democracy are these baseless attacks on judges, assuming that they are Republican judges or Democratic judges or MAGA-right judges—whatever that is supposed to mean. I guess that means they were appointed by President Trump, but also confirmed by the U.S. Senate. The irony of calling a Senate-confirmed Federal judge a “MAGA judge” in talking about the importance of public trust in the judiciary is pretty rich.

I want to commend Chief Judge Godbey and the judges of the Northern District of Texas from resisting this political pressure and commend them for doing what they know is right for their district and the people who live and litigate within that district. This was, without a doubt, the right decision for multiple reasons.

As a practical matter, the majority leader's preferred case assignment scheme would likely subject litigants to logistical nightmares. I know Texas is a lot bigger than New York. But take the Northern District of Texas, for example. It is one of the largest judicial districts in the country. It stretches over 100 out of our 254 counties and encompasses more than 96,000 acres. If the Northern District of Texas were a State, it would be the ninth largest State. If Senator SCHUMER had his way, a suit filed in one division could ultimately be heard by any division within the Northern District.

Someone—say a woman challenging the State's abortion laws in Fort Worth—could have to travel all the way to Lubbock for her day in court. And a company in Dallas challenging government overreach or perhaps a new environmental regulation would have to go all the way to Amarillo to have that case decided, under this random assignment system. This would obviously create a lot of burdens on litigants—my constituents, Texans, American citizens. It would create burdensome and expensive hurdles that both parties in a case would have to overcome for no real purpose.

We all know that cases decided by district judges get considered by circuit courts—appellate courts—and, potentially, even the U.S. Supreme

Court. But the majority leader's political pressure on the Northern District would ultimately harm access to justice for those litigants who don't have the time or the money to travel long distances or to pay their lawyers in order to do so.

But the more fundamental issue is the constitutional one. Under the law, only Congress has the power to pass venue changes—that is where a case is heard—not the courts. The courts apply laws that the Congress passes and were signed into law by the President. The Constitution vests Congress with the sole authority to determine the structure and organization of the lower courts, and that includes venue laws, where cases are heard. From there, each individual district has the latitude to determine how cases are ultimately assigned.

So if the majority leader wants to change the way that venue laws are applied, he can try to do so, but he has to do so through a change in the law, not by trying to intimidate the judges in that division.

Over the last years, our Democratic colleagues have repeatedly launched deeply concerning attacks against America's independent judiciary. Several years ago, five of our Democratic colleagues threatened that the Supreme Court would be “restructured” if it failed to rule a certain way in a case related to the Second Amendment.

The following year, the majority leader, the Senator from New York, stood in front of the Supreme Court and threatened two sitting Supreme Court Justices by name if they didn't rule the way he wanted them to rule in a case involving abortion. He said:

I want to tell you Gorsuch. I want to tell you Kavanaugh. You have released the whirlwind and you will pay the price. You won't know what hit you if you go forward with these awful decisions.

How shameful on the part of the majority leader to stand on the steps of the Supreme Court and to threaten the sitting Justices unless they ruled in a particular way.

The next year, just a few months after President Biden took office, our Democratic colleagues in both the Senate and the House introduced a bill that would allow him to pack the Supreme Court with four new liberal Justices.

A couple years later, Senator WYDEN, the Senator from Oregon, advocated for the Biden administration to ignore a potential court order from a Northern District of Texas court because he didn't agree with it. He actually said that the Biden administration should ignore the ruling of a Federal judge—not appeal it; ignore it.

Then 15 of our Democratic colleagues recommended slashing the Supreme Court's budget if it failed to meet their demand to implement a new code of ethics that had our Democratic colleagues' stamp of approval.

And, more recently, some of our Democratic colleagues have called on

Justice Sotomayor to retire so President Biden can install a new liberal Justice, likely to serve for many years in the future.

Democrats' attacks on our judiciary have varied, but the theme is always the same. It is all about control; it is all about politics; it is all about outcomes—not justice and the rule of law.

Their message is: Deliver the wins we want, impose a code of ethics that we wrote, and retire when we say.

Well, we all know that lifetime tenure is provided for Federal judges to provide for their independence so they can't be intimidated, so they can't be forced to retire. And we can't cut their pay for the same reason.

Forget this idea of fair and impartial courts. They want judges who fall in line, salute smartly, and follow orders. As I said earlier today, an independent judiciary is essential to our democracy and the rule of law. It is the crown jewels of our government, of our Constitution. The courts cannot and must not be subjected to pressure campaigns from anyone—politicians, political activists, or anybody else.

The Federal judiciary certainly is not subservient to Congress; it is a separate and coequal branch of the government—coequal. Our Founders deliberately designed a system of checks and balances to prevent any one branch from forcing the other two to bend to its will. But that is exactly what our Democratic colleagues are trying to do, and it is wrong. It is unconstitutional, and it must be stopped.

Today's Democratic party is trying to blur the lines between the legislative and judicial branches of our government in order to secure partisan wins. And there is a reason why their efforts haven't had much success. Their proposals are unpopular. They are unwarranted, and they are flatout unconstitutional.

I am glad the Northern District of Texas did not cave to Senator SCHUMER's demands or the Judicial Conference's ill-conceived guidance. Democrats have made it clear that they will do whatever it takes to secure partisan wins in the courts.

They ought to try passing laws here in Congress with open debate and opportunity for everybody to participate in the process; but the problem is, when they lose legislative battles, they simply rely on the courts to get the wins that they ultimately want.

But the American people can rest assured that Republicans will continue to defend America's independent judiciary and fight these attacks no matter what form they may take.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be able to speak for up to 7 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, inflation numbers came out this morning, and it won't surprise anyone to discover that it was yet another month of elevated inflation, par for the course for the Biden administration.

Inflation that not only remained well above the Federal Reserve's target inflation rate for yet another month, it actually kicked up in March to 3.5 percent, not exactly a hopeful trend.

It has been a rough few years for the American people under President Biden, thanks in large part to the President and Congressional Democrats' decision to push forward with their American Rescue Plan spending spree, despite, I might add, warnings even from liberal economists that it ran the risk of setting off inflation. But now the entire Biden administration has been one long inflation crisis.

Today, a typical family is paying \$1,000 more per month to maintain the same standard of living they enjoyed when President Biden took office. Now, think about that for just a moment. Today, a typical family is paying \$1,000 more per month—\$12,000 more per year—to maintain the same standard of living they enjoyed when President Biden took office—if, of course, these families even have that money available. There is no question that there are families out there—a lot, I suspect—whose standard of living has diminished since President Biden took office because they simply don't have the money to maintain the same living standard with the elevated prices in the Biden economy.

The list of price hikes in the Biden economy is long. Groceries are up 21 percent since President Biden took office. Energy prices are up 38 percent. Gas prices are up 47 percent and are on the rise. The cost of shelter is up 20 percent. Car repairs and maintenance are up 30 percent. And the list goes on.

I mentioned the increase in grocery prices. The cost of food now takes up a larger share of Americans' disposal income than it has in 30 years.

A recent Bloomberg article noted:

Nationally, seven in 10 consumers say they are very or extremely concerned about the cost of groceries. . . . Forty-two percent said they were worried about having enough money to buy food in December, the last time FMI asked, compared to 26 percent at the March 2020 onset of the pandemic.

Well, that is a pretty grim statistic, and it is not the only one. On the home-buying front, one recent article reported:

The income needed to comfortably afford a home is up 80 percent since 2020.

Let me just repeat that.

The income needed to comfortably afford a home is up 80 percent since 2020.

Mr. President, 80 percent—and I don't need to tell anyone that incomes have

not risen by 80 percent over the same period.

President Biden loves to talk about giving Americans "a little bit of breathing room." Well, Americans have lost their breathing room in the Biden economy. They have seen their disposable income dry up. They have had to downgrade their standard of living. They have had to turn to savings accounts and credit cards to make ends meet. It is no wonder that nearly half of voters say their personal financial situation is getting worse or that 55 percent of Americans say they worry a great deal about inflation or that 58 percent of voters say the economy is on the wrong track.

The sad thing is that President Biden has apparently learned nothing from his inflation crisis. He is still set on the same kind of massive government spending that helped plunge us into this inflation crisis in the first place. The budget he released last month was full of massive new spending programs, accompanied by a staggering \$5 trillion in tax hikes—tax hikes that would unquestionably have their own damaging economic effects, like discouraging job creation and driving up energy prices for hard-working Americans.

President Biden's first term in office has been characterized by economic misery for Americans, and if the President gets his way, a second term would likely be characterized by economic misery as well. It has been 36 months of elevated inflation in the Biden economy—36 months—and the end is still not in sight. It is starting to look like it won't be as long as President Biden is still in office.

I yield the floor.

NOMINATION OF ANN MARIE MCIFF ALLEN

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today, the Senate will vote to confirm Judge Ann Marie Allen to the U.S. District Court for the District of Utah.

Born in Richfield, UT, Judge Allen earned her B.A. from Brigham Young University and her J.D. from Brigham Young University J. Reuben Clark Law School.

After teaching at BYU J. Reuben Clark Law School and Utah Valley University, Judge Allen began working in private practice under a public defender contract with Beaver County, UT, handling indigent defense cases and Criminal Justice Act panel appointments in Federal criminal matters.

In 2007, Judge Allen became the deputy Iron County attorney and prosecuted a range of felonies and misdemeanors. She returned to private practice in 2013 while also serving part-time as the deputy Garfield County attorney. In 2016, Judge Allen was appointed by the president of Southern Utah University to serve as the university's special counsel and director of ethics and compliance. She became the university's first general counsel in 2018. In 2020, Judge Allen was appointed by then-Utah Governor Gary R. Herbert to the Utah State Fifth District

Court. Over the course of her judicial career, she has presided over hundreds of civil cases and thousands of criminal cases resulting in plea bargains.

The American Bar Association unanimously rated Judge Allen as "well qualified," and she has the strong support of Senators LEE and ROMNEY. Her nomination was unanimously advanced by the Judiciary Committee.

Judge Allen's significant courtroom experience and dedication to service make her an excellent nominee to the District of Utah. I will vote in favor of her confirmation and encourage my colleagues to do the same.

VOTE ON ALLEN NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Allen nomination?

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk called the roll.

The result was announced—yeas 100, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 120 Ex.]

YEAS—100

Baldwin	Grassley	Reed
Barrasso	Hagerty	Ricketts
Bennet	Hassan	Risch
Blackburn	Hawley	Romney
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Rosen
Booker	Hickenlooper	Rounds
Boozman	Hirono	Rubio
Braun	Hoeven	Sanders
Britt	Hyde-Smith	Schatz
Brown	Johnson	Schmitt
Budd	Kaine	Schumer
Butler	Kelly	Scott (FL)
Cantwell	Kennedy	Scott (SC)
Capito	King	Shaheen
Cardin	Klobuchar	Sinema
Carper	Lankford	Smith
Casey	Lee	Stabenow
Cassidy	Lujan	Sullivan
Collins	Lummis	Tester
Coons	Manchin	Thune
Cornyn	Markey	Tillis
Cortez Masto	Marshall	Tuberville
Cotton	McConnell	Van Hollen
Cramer	Menendez	Vance
Crapo	Merkley	Warner
Cruz	Moran	Warnock
Daines	Mullin	Warren
Duckworth	Murkowski	Welch
Durbin	Murphy	Whitehouse
Ernst	Murray	Wicker
Fetterman	Osoff	Wyden
Fischer	Padilla	Young
Gillibrand	Paul	
Graham	Peters	

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. CORTEZ MASTO). Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.