

Since the beginning of the Biden administration, the Senate has confirmed 201 highly qualified, independent, even-handed judges to the Federal bench. They represent the best of our legal system—demographically and professionally diverse; they respect the rule of law; they adhere to precedent; and they answer only to the Constitution. We should add another to that list today—Judge Maldonado, an accomplished litigator and distinguished jurist, who will be a great asset to the Seventh Circuit.

She graduated from Harvard College and Columbia Law School. She clerked for U.S. District Judge Ruben Castillo—a retired judge, my friend, and an esteemed jurist in the Northern District.

Following her clerkship, Judge Maldonado spent nearly 20 years at a firm specializing in employment, civil rights, and fraud matters. Throughout her career, she tried several cases to verdict, judgment, or final decision.

In addition, she was appointed by the Cook County State's Attorney's Office to serve as a special assistant, tasked with investigating fraud. From 2019 to 2022, she was appointed by the Illinois attorney general to serve as a consent decree monitor in two matters and as a special assistant AG to investigate consumer fraud. You can draw the conclusion from these appointments that she is trusted by her colleagues to be professional.

In 2022, the Senate confirmed Judge Maldonado on a bipartisan vote—supported by the Acting President pro tempore and myself—to the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois. Since her confirmation, she has presided over almost 1,000 cases—that is in a matter of just 2 years—plus has ruled on thousands of motions and has issued approximately 300 substantive decisions.

Notably, Judge Maldonado has never been reversed by a reviewing court in that period of time—nearly 1,000 cases. Despite what her critics have to say, her record is one of the best. It shows she carefully resolves cases in a way that ensures that litigants feel they have been treated fairly.

Once confirmed, Judge Maldonado will be the first Hispanic judge to ever serve on the Seventh Circuit. History will be made.

Judge Maldonado has my strong support and the support of my other home State Senator and good friend, the Acting President pro tempore, Senator TAMMY DUCKWORTH.

Judge Maldonado, incidentally, received a unanimous—unanimous—“well qualified” rating from the American Bar Association based on her integrity, professional competence, and judicial temperament. She has broad support across the legal community, from law enforcement to labor unions representing millions of members.

I urge my Senate colleagues to join me in confirming this highly qualified nominee.

TRIBUTE TO MUHAMMAD YUNUS

Madam President, on a separate, unrelated subject, 14 years ago, the late Senator Mike Enzi, a Republican from the State of Wyoming, joined me in honoring the Congressional Gold Medal to an amazing man, a pioneer in alleviating global poverty. The recipient was Bangladeshi Professor Muhammad Yunus—shown here in this photo—the founder of Grameen Bank.

I have been fortunate to visit Bangladesh several times and many times with Professor Yunus.

What he came up with as an idea of making small loans to the poorest people on Earth literally changed the world. He changed Bangladesh and the families there who were struggling to feed their children to the point where they could buy a sewing machine and finally make a living with a few dollars and with the promise that they would pay it back.

This idea of Grameen Bank—the people's bank—was Professor Yunus's idea. It revolutionized something called microlending, which hadn't been heard of before this time. It provided easy access to small loans to more than 7 million borrowers—95 percent of them were women or groups of women—and changed poverty reduction in the process. Such efforts eventually earned Professor Yunus the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006.

Tragically, despite the achievements of this great professor, despite the recognition which he has had on an international basis, he has been harassed by the Bangladeshi Government almost nonstop. They pursued an inexplicable, petty vendetta against Professor Yunus, levying over 100—over 100—unsubstantiated criminal and civil charges. In fact, he will soon go on trial again—another trial—this time facing possible life in prison on a non-sense charge.

Last year, because of the frustration of his friends around the world over the way he has been treated by the local government in Bangladesh, 170 global leaders, including more than 100 Nobel laureates, wrote to Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina urging an end to these judicial proceedings and harassment. I have made similar calls and will do so again here on the floor today.

Quite simply, what is happening to Professor Muhammad Yunus is a travesty that will seriously harm our relationship with Bangladesh. It must stop immediately. Enough.

NATO

Madam President, on a separate topic, this will be a week of great global importance. World leaders from some of our closest and aspiring allies will gather this week in Washington for a momentous anniversary.

Seventy-five years ago, out of the ashes of World War II, 12 nations signed an agreement to establish the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, known as NATO. This historic alliance was bound together by a commitment to

collective defense enshrined under article 5. Quite simply, an attack on one of the allies is an attack on all.

This simple but powerful commitment after World War II to share defense has helped to keep peace in Europe for generations. It has deterred and protected member nations from Soviet threats in the past and now Russian threats in the present.

It has been so successful in its mission that additional members have regularly sought to join the alliance. It now includes 32 nations, the most recent being Sweden and Finland, two formidable allies that bring considerable capacity to the organization. We in the Senate voted 95 to 1, on a bipartisan basis, to ratify their entry.

Many nations previously under Soviet domination have joined, vowing that they will never live under Russian tyranny again.

I know one in particular. My mother's homeland of Lithuania is a country that I have been lucky enough to visit before I was elected to Congress and since. I saw Soviet repression at its worst in 1978 and now see democracy at its best in this current situation.

Under the leadership of my friend and former President, Valdas Adamkus, Lithuania joined NATO, along with its Baltic neighbors, Latvia and Estonia, in 2004. Two years ago, President Adamkus was honored by the Lithuanian Parliament for his contribution to the nation's integration into NATO and the European Union.

Today, Lithuania is one of the alliance's most outspoken voices. I am so proud of Lithuania, a nation small in population and size but large in terms of its impact on the world with the courage they have shown over and over again.

They have vocally supported Ukraine. They have welcomed Belarusian and Russian democratic voices. And they hosted last year's NATO summit, which I was honored to attend.

My mother would be proud of her birth country.

This week, the Senate Baltic Caucus cochairs, Senator GRASSLEY and I, will introduce a resolution recognizing the strong U.S.-Baltic relationship and the important contributions these nations have made to NATO.

In recent years, I have had the honor of joining several of my colleagues, led by Senators SHAHEEN and TILLIS, to attend the annual NATO summit. What struck me at these summit meetings was the sustained resolve and common purpose in defeating Russia in the war against Ukraine. Our NATO allies, many former captives of the Soviet Union, have enduring memories of that experience. They are determined to not allow Russia's imperial actions in Ukraine prevail.

I want to recognize President Joe Biden's clear-eyed leadership in galvanizing and reinvigorating the critical NATO alliance and its support for Ukraine.

Let's put the cards on the table. Under former President Trump, the future of NATO was in doubt, and NATO members did not know if the alliance would continue to exist, let alone rise to any challenge. When President Biden took office, that changed immediately. He made this alliance alive again at a time when it was needed, now more than ever with the situation in Ukraine.

To expand to include Finland and Sweden was a dramatic move forward. Hundreds of miles of Finnish border, for example, with Russia are now part of the NATO alliance on the Finnish side.

I spoke to a man, Niinisto, who was the President of Finland, about the decision of his nation, after so many decades in the Cold War, to finally step out and join NATO against Russia. He said: Senator, it came down to a telephone conversation I had with Vladimir Putin. I called him to tell him that Finland was going to join NATO. Putin said to me: You don't have to worry about us. Don't join NATO. You don't need to.

And President Niinisto said: I told him I could no longer trust him after what he did in Poland and Georgia and other places.

That just shows how important the NATO alliance is—that a country as substantial and with a storied history like Finland would decide to step forward and finally enlist their support for the NATO alliance. It speaks well of the alliance, what it has achieved and what it can in the future. And it speaks well of President Biden's leadership in expanding NATO at a critical moment in history.

Despite Putin's warped paranoia to the contrary, NATO is not a threat to Russia. It will defend every inch of its members' territory from Russia or any other attacker.

Putin's colossal strategic blunder in Ukraine cost the lives of more than 100,000 Russians so far, and it has devastated Russia's standing around the world, leaving Russia no other choice than to beg for weapons from, of all places, North Korea and Iran.

Much to his chagrin, Putin's senseless invasion strengthened and expanded NATO, and recent summits have included historic participation of several countries from the Asia-Pacific region, strengthening the alliance even more.

I believe Ukraine's future rests ultimately within NATO, and, until then, the United States and our allies must continue to support the defense against Russia.

I think Lithuanian President Nauseda argued this well: Europeans understand that Ukraine's fight is their fight, and it is our fight too.

I share that sentiment.

So on this 75th anniversary, let's recommit to this historic alliance that has served the world so well in maintaining stability and freedom. Let us continue to work toward peace.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Texas.

HURRICANE BERYL

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, early this morning, Hurricane Beryl made landfall in Texas as a category 1 hurricane.

Texas, and particularly Southeast Texas and the Houston area, and all up and down the gulf coast, are no stranger to hurricanes.

This one struck the Texas coast near Matagorda, with torrential rain and intense storm surge, which is very dangerous, as you know, and sustained winds of 80 miles per hour. Throughout the day, Beryl has taken its sweet time traveling the expanse of our State, bearing down on our communities in the southeast and eastern parts of the State with strong winds, a lot of rain, a lot of flooding, and even tornadoes.

More than 2.7 million Texans have lost power, and that number is expected to rise as the storm continues to move its way across the State. Sadly, at least two people have died so far, mainly due to trees falling on their homes.

I have reached out to the county judges and mayors in some of the hardest hit areas and assured them that we are monitoring the situation, but, more importantly, we are standing by, ready to do anything we can to be of assistance. And, of course, we will be working with Governor Abbott and the State officials when it comes to seeking assistance at the Federal level for disaster relief.

By tomorrow morning, the worst effects of Hurricane Beryl should be behind us, and we will have a better sense of the full extent of the damage caused by the storm. Until then, I urge all of my fellow Texans to follow the guidance of local authorities and do everything possible to stay safe.

There is an expression—"turn around; don't drown"—which cautions people not to drive into standing water in the roadway. That certainly can't be said enough. Things, stuff, is replaceable. People are not.

As always, I am incredibly thankful to the first responders who are putting their own lives on the line to support their communities and the many folks who are working with the utilities trying to get power back on line as well. In many areas, search-and-rescue operations began before the Sun even rose this morning.

So thank you to those who are on the frontlines saving lives as Hurricane Beryl bears down on our State and to the linemen, again, repairing the downed lines as quickly as possible.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Madam President, on another matter, we have officially crossed the halfway mark of 2024. Election day is only about 4 months away, and the Senate still has a mountain of work piled up to complete during that period of time.

The first task on the list is to pass a strong National Defense Authorization

Act. Congress, has, of course, passed the NDAA for the past 63 consecutive years. It is a must-pass piece of legislation. It is time to build on that record, particularly at this time—the most dangerous time, I think, our country and the world have seen since World War II. The threats are everywhere, it seems.

I want to commend Chairman JACK REED and Ranking Member ROGER WICKER and our colleagues on the Armed Services Committee for doing their job in advancing the 64th annual NDAA last month.

This bill was carefully crafted over a period of months and ultimately passed the committee on a bipartisan vote of 22 to 3. That strong bipartisan vote includes provisions offered by Members, of course, on both sides of the aisle.

The NDAA, the Defense authorization bill, is absolutely essential to America's defense, our military readiness, and the safety and well-being of our troops and our military families. At a time when America's position on the world stage is being tested by all of our adversaries around the world, a strong Defense authorization bill could not be more important. It should be signed into law before Congress funds our national defense, which brings me to our next big task, which is appropriations—paying the bills, keeping the lights on.

Before September 30, which is not very far away, Congress needs to pass annual appropriations bills. There are 12 of them, as the Presiding Officer knows. These bills fund every aspect of the Federal Government, from our mighty military to disaster assistance programs. We know that passing these bills is no easy task. It requires a lot of time and consideration by our colleagues on the Appropriations Committee.

But the majority leader's part-time Senate schedule has not given them much room to maneuver. By that, I mean we come into session often on a Tuesday and leave on a Thursday. This week, because of the 2-week break we have just returned from, is maybe an exception.

Here we are on Monday, and we will have one vote—what is known colloquially in the Senate as a bed-check vote—at 5:30, on a nomination, but that is about it.

But when the Senate is not meeting, which seems like most of the time now, we can't meet to consider bills or advance critical legislation. It makes it difficult, if not impossible, to solve the biggest challenges facing our country.

This summer, the Senate's timeline is so truncated that the Appropriations Committee is skipping subcommittee markups entirely. They are moving bills straight to a vote by the full committee because there is simply not enough time, given the remaining time in the fiscal year, which ends September 30, to follow regular order, which is something both the majority leader and the chairman and ranking