

Biden Judicial Nominee Confirmed as Harris Breaks Deadlock in Senate Vote



Vice President Kamala Harris played a pivotal role in breaking a deadlock in the U.S. Senate, confirming Natasha Merle, a civil rights lawyer nominated for a federal judge position in New York. Merle, who currently serves as a litigator for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, has been confirmed to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York, which is located in Brooklyn.

The final vote on Merle's confirmation stood at 50-49, with Harris's tie-breaking vote being the deciding factor. However, it should be noted that the procedural vote preceding the confirmation resulted in a 50-50 tie, requiring Harris's intervention to break it. Notably, Democratic Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia joined all Republicans in opposing Merle's nomination. This marks the fourth occasion in recent weeks where Manchin has opposed President Joe Biden's judicial picks.

Merle's confirmation marks a significant milestone, as she becomes the 100th district court nominee selected by President Biden to secure Senate confirmation. Moreover, she joins a series of civil rights lawyers who have been confirmed to federal bench positions in the past month, reflecting the administration's emphasis on diversifying the judiciary and promoting equal representation.

Prior to the crucial vote, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, a Democrat from New York who recommended Merle, spoke highly of her qualifications. Gillibrand described Merle as a "deeply experienced litigator" who would bring a "crucial and unique perspective" to the federal bench. These remarks highlight Merle's extensive legal background and the value she would bring to her judicial role.

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However, Merle faced opposition from Republicans due to remarks she made during a podcast in 2017. In those remarks, she expressed her belief that politicians denouncing white supremacy while supporting Republican-backed policies, such as stricter voter identification requirements, seemed inconsistent. This stance drew criticism from Republicans, who viewed it as an attack on common-sense election integrity measures.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Republican, took to the Senate floor on Tuesday to express his concerns about Merle's nomination. He described her as an "activist lawyer" with a penchant for taking extreme and inflammatory positions. McConnell specifically referenced Merle's comments on voter ID laws, which he defended as necessary for preserving the integrity of elections, but which have faced criticism for disproportionately affecting minority voters.

Merle's professional background includes serving at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund since 2016. Prior to that, she worked as a federal public defender in New York and participated in a fellowship with a prominent law firm in the state. These experiences have provided Merle with a comprehensive understanding of civil rights issues and legal intricacies, shaping her into a qualified candidate for the federal judiciary.

With Merle's confirmation, President Biden continues to make progress in his efforts to reshape the federal judiciary by appointing diverse and highly qualified individuals to key positions. By bringing in civil rights lawyers like Merle, the administration aims to ensure that the judiciary reflects the values of equality, fairness, and justice.

Vice President Kamala Harris's decisive vote broke the deadlock in the Senate and secured the confirmation of Natasha Merle as a federal judge. Merle's extensive legal background and commitment to civil rights make her a valuable addition to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York. As the Biden administration continues to prioritize judicial nominations, this confirmation represents a significant step towards diversifying the judiciary and promoting equality within the legal system.