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Rep. Raskin poised to become ranking Democrat on House Judiciary Committee

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U.S. Rep. Jamie Raskin's move is part of an effort among some younger House Democrats to replace older colleagues at the top of some committees. (Ulysses Muñoz/The Baltimore Banner)

WASHINGTON — Expected to be the top Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee in January, U.S. Rep. Jamie Raskin said he is focused on safeguarding the Constitution. His Democratic colleagues say he's ready to lead.

"My top priority is to defend the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the rule of law and the freedoms of the people," Raskin told Capital News Service on Thursday.

Raskin revealed on Monday that he was challenging veteran U.S. Rep. Jerry Nadler of New York for the top Democratic spot on the judiciary panel. Nadler, who served as chairman and ranking Democrat on the committee for seven years, removed himself from the running Wednesday after House Democrats began shifting toward Raskin, whose 8th District covers most of Montgomery County and a small part of Prince George's County.

There do not appear to be other competitors for the judiciary seat, but Raskin said "you never know what's going to happen on Capitol Hill."

In Nadler's letter to his colleagues announcing his decision to relinquish his position, he called Raskin an "exceptional leader" and a spokesperson for Democratic Party values.

"I'm very grateful to Chairman Nadler for the extraordinary work he's done and continues to do in Congress," Raskin told CNS. "If I'm lucky enough to become the ranking member, I would lean on him very heavily on every major important decision."

Raskin's move is part of an effort among some younger House Democrats to replace older colleagues at the top of some committees.

Raskin, who will turn 62 on Dec. 13, will start his fifth House term in January. Nadler, 77, will begin his 17th term next month.

If selected, Raskin would act as a counterpoint to the chairman, U.S. Rep. Jim Jordan, the Ohio Republican who is a staunch Donald Trump ally.

To get the appointment, Raskin will have to be nominated by the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee and voted on by the Democratic Caucus, according to the Congressional Research Service.

U.S. Rep. Glenn Ivey, a Maryland Democrat who serves on the Judiciary Committee, pointed to Raskin's work to defeat an impeachment inquiry against President Joe Biden in the House Oversight and Accountability Committee as emblematic of the work he would do on the Judiciary Committee.

"I think he'll bring a lot of energy. He's very dynamic, and as he showed on the oversight committee, that'll play well on Judiciary," Ivey said.

Raskin serves as the ranking member on the House oversight panel, where he was a frequent critic of Republican policies and clashed often with the chairman, U.S. Rep. James Comer, a Republican from Kentucky.

U.S. Rep. Maxwell Frost, a Florida Democrat who serves on the oversight committee, told CNS that Raskin has been a mentor to him in his first term in Congress. Raskin is a team builder in his current ranking member role, Frost said, leading fellow lawmakers in messaging sessions and team workshops.

"He has the grit and grace needed to be the ranking member of such an important committee, and I'm excited for him to take over the reins of Judiciary, too, because we need him now more than ever," Frost said.

The House Judiciary Committee is a standing committee that deals with legal matters, including the federal courts, constitutional amendments, monopolies and, rarely, impeachments.

In his Monday letter to colleagues announcing his run, Raskin said the committee is where Democrats will wage their "front-line of defense" to protect freedom, the integrity of the Justice Department and the FBI, and the security of the Constitution against the incoming Trump administration.

"We are in the fight of our lives," Raskin wrote.

“Each one of us must reflect hard and decide — in close consultation with colleagues and leadership — where we can be most personally effective in the fight to recapture a majority in Congress that can promote national progress,” the Marylander told his colleagues.

U.S. Rep. Dutch Ruppersberger, a Maryland Democrat who is leaving Congress next month, told CNS that Raskin is a leader who pulls people together and is prepared to argue his case.

“He’s one of the biggest people that you can always rely on. He’ll always tell the truth and, when he believes in something, he’ll fight for it,” Ruppersberger said.

Raskin, a former constitutional law professor and Maryland state senator, was the lead manager in Trump’s second impeachment trial and is a member of the House’s Jan. 6th Select Committee.