

Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.)
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee
Executive Business Meeting
January 30, 2014

Today, we have just five nominations on the agenda – three judicial nominations and two executive nominations. All are listed on the agenda for the first time, and I understand Republicans may seek to have them held over until next week.

We have had three sentencing bills pending on the Committee's agenda for seven weeks while staff from both sides of the aisle worked diligently to find a compromise that incorporates both front-end and back-end reforms.

Unfortunately, we have not yet reached agreement on a back-end proposal but Senators Whitehouse and Cornyn will continue their efforts to do so. The bill I introduced with Senator Paul, the Justice Safety Valve Act, applies to all mandatory minimums in the Federal code. Yet, after learning that more than 50 percent of our federal prisoners are incarcerated on drug offenses, it made sense to focus our attention on mandatory minimums in that area where we could garner the most bipartisan agreement. That is what the Smarter Sentencing Act does. I will not call up the Paul-Leahy bill, so that we can make bipartisan progress today.

I want to thank Senators Durbin, Lee, Whitehouse, Cornyn and Feinstein for the time that they have dedicated to this effort. This hard work demonstrates the bipartisan recognition that turning a blind eye to our ever-expanding prison population is no longer an option.

We will turn to the Smarter Sentencing Act after Ranking Member Grassley has an opportunity to speak. Then, we will begin our discussion with Senator Durbin offering a managers' amendment.

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