

Statement of

The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
Vermont
June 22, 2006

Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy
Ranking Democrat, Committee on the Judiciary
Executive Business Meeting
June 22, 2006

Voting Rights Reauthorization

The Chairman has listed S.2703, the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act on today's agenda. I note that 12 of the 18 Members of this Committee are cosponsors of this legislation. We have held extensive hearings on this important subject over the past three months. I had hoped that we would have completed all necessary hearings in May and that we would have been in position to have reported the bill by now. We are behind schedule and should not delay consideration further. I understand that the Chairman has stated that we will report this bill out of Committee next week. I look forward to that and I intend to cooperate in that important bipartisan effort.

This timing is important because after the upcoming recess, there are only about 10 weeks left in the entire legislative session. During that time we have a full agenda containing many important items ranging from a budget to 13 appropriations bills to the lobbying reform and comprehensive immigration reform conference reports. There is also legislation on stem cell research and measures to help lower gas prices and health care costs. I was quite disappointed to hear this week that despite all our bipartisan work on comprehensive immigration reform, Republican leaders are going back to square one and intend to start over with hearings later this summer. I hope that the President will join us and be an effective advocate for enacting comprehensive immigration reform in the time remaining to us this session.

Copyright Legislation

The Chairman has also included a House-passed copyright royalty bill to which I expect we will offer a bipartisan amendment. I have joined with the Chairman and the chair of the subcommittee to correct the CARP procedures and to clarify that Copyright Royalty Judges have discretion to distribute a portion of cable and satellite royalties on an interim basis and before the end of all royalty distribution proceedings. With what we are advised is more than \$1 billion in royalties being withheld, this is a useful clarification. I hope that we can report it today.

Surveillance

I do not know what else the Chairman expects to see accomplished this morning. He continues to carry forward the surveillance bills from week to week. I have not received a call from the Vice President on these matters and do not know if Republicans on the Committee are yet prepared to proceed with the hearings and oversight that we need to proceed to conduct. I will have more to say about these matters if we turn to them.

Press Shield

I understand that Committee staff was meeting last evening with regard to the press shield legislation. I have said that I support the principle, and I intend to support a bill. Since our last session, we have received opposition from the Department of Justice and the Judicial Conference has provided drafting assistance.

Ninth Circuit Split

I was surprised to see the listing of a bill on today's agenda to split the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Press was reporting that this issue would not come up during this busy year but would be considered next year. The overwhelming majority of Ninth Circuit judges oppose the split and the majority of Senators representing States within the Ninth Circuit oppose the split. I will certainly want to hear from the senior Senator from California on this measure. This is another issue that seems to surface during election years.

Gang Bill

I will have a longer statement on gang legislation when we proceed to that measure.

At present I am working very hard to try to complete work on sex offender legislation, a version of which has passed both houses. I think if we focused first on completing that bill without complicating it with other matters, we could complete our work by mid-July and pass a strong measure by July 25. That is my first priority. If we seek simultaneously to resolve extensive differences over provisions in other crime legislation and insist on that before we make progress on the sex offender bill, we will miss the boat.

#####