

Statement of

The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
Vermont
January 25, 2007

Opening Statement of Chairman Patrick Leahy
Senate Judiciary Committee
Executive Business Meeting

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Let me begin by welcoming our two new Members, Senator Ben Cardin of Maryland and Senator Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island. They each bring great experience, character and judgment to this Committee. As they demonstrated at the oversight hearing with the Attorney General last week, they are already full and active Members. I am delighted they are each with us.

I also want to welcome back to the Committee our returning Members and, in particular, those who stood for reelection in November. Senator Kennedy is returning and will chair the Immigration Subcommittee. Senator Kohl will chair the Antitrust Subcommittee. Senator Feinstein will chair the Terrorism Subcommittee. I also welcome back Senator Hatch, who will serve as the Ranking on the Antitrust Subcommittee, and Senator Kyl, who will serve as the Ranking on the Terrorism Subcommittee.

I will miss my good friend Mike DeWine, who was a long-time Member of this Committee and worked so closely with Senator Kohl over the years.

Today we hope to organize, adopt our Rules, establish our Subcommittees and adopt our funding resolution. Once those organizational requirements are completed, we can get about the business of the Committee.

Legislation

Today, I am asking the Committee to approve Senator Salazar's bill to add a well-known Hispanic to the list of names on the Voting Rights Act reauthorization we enacted last year. Returning Members will remember that we did this last year in connection with the bill this Committee reported. In order to expedite final passage by the Senate, however, we took up and considered the House-passed version that did not include this provision. I said then that I would work with Senator Salazar to enact this change.

The other bill on today's agenda is Senator Feinstein's bill to revise the authority for the appointment of United States Attorneys. This is a matter that was discussed with the Attorney

General at the oversight hearing last week. When we get to that matter, I will yield to her for comment.

Nominations

Also on the agenda are nominations of five men and women to lifetime appointments as Federal judges. Three are for vacancies that have been designated judicial emergencies by the Administrative Office of the Courts. Because of that, I have sought to expedite Committee consideration and include them today on our first agenda. I have inquired of each Member of the Committee whether a hearing is requested on these nominations this year. I thank the Members for expediting their consideration of these nominations and, in particular, thank our new Members.

When we are able successfully to complete our consideration of these five nominees -- and once the paperwork is complete and I have completed consulting with the Members of the Committee on both sides of the aisle -- I intend to proceed with another group of these important judicial nominations. They will be drawn from the January 9 nominations of the President and will be nominations on which a hearing was previously held. A few were previously considered by this Committee. I am seeking to expedite their consideration first.

One other nomination of special note is that of Norman Randy Smith to the Ninth Circuit. Unless a Member of the Committee requests a further hearing, I hope to be able to proceed to that circuit court nomination to the vacant Idaho seat on the Ninth Circuit expeditiously, as well.

Before recognizing Senator Specter for any comment he might wish to make, I wanted to say how much I have enjoyed working with him when he chaired this Committee in the 109th Congress and how much we all appreciate his courtesies at the beginning of this Congress. By continuing to notice hearings while the Republican Caucus was meeting to consider the Senate organizing resolutions, we were able to proceed with several very important hearings on privacy, Iraqi refugees, drug competition and with the oversight hearing last week at which the Attorney General participated. I thank him as well for his work on our Rules, subcommittees and funding resolution. He has been a good and fair chairman and is one of the most hard-working Senators I have ever seen. I will have more to say about him at the conclusion of our meeting but recognize him now without further delay.

Conclusion

I noted at the outset of this meeting that I had a further comment on the chairmanship of Senator Specter. Recently, one of the veteran reporters who has covered the Committee, Ted Goldman of Legal Times, shared with me a brilliant photograph taken by The Washington Post photographer, Melena Mara, at one of our business meetings last Congress. I want to acknowledge both of them and thank them. I wanted you all to see this too as a reminder that despite the difficult issues on which we work on this Committee, we can do so with good spirit and bipartisanship.

So I intend to display this photograph in our Judiciary Reception room and do so with respect and affection for my good friend from Pennsylvania.