

Statement of

The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
Vermont
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STATEMENT OF SENATOR PATRICK LEAHY
CHAIRMAN, SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
OPENING STATEMENT
EXECUTIVE BUSINESS MEETING
MAY 22, 2008

As we did last week when we were so productive, I hope that we will work through the agenda as soon as we have assembled a quorum this morning.

Earlier this week the Senate passed the Protecting Our Children Comes First Act. This Committee had voted to report it last year after I introduced it with Senators Hatch, Lincoln and Shelby, and Congressman Lampson and Biggert had introduced the House companion. For five months, we have been seeking to consider it in order to extend the authorization of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and improve coordination with Federal, state and local law enforcement. Finally, as National Missing Children's Day approached, the Senator who had held up Senate consideration for those five months withdrew his hold and we were able to proceed. That bill is now headed to the White House to be signed into law by the President.

The Senate also passed the Keeping the Internet Devoid of Sexual Predators Act, or KIDS Act. It had been introduced by Senator Schumer and cosponsored by a number of us on this Committee before we reported it last month.

The Committee held a number of important hearings this week, including one on preserving the right to vote for all Americans and another on the soaring price of gas. This afternoon, Senator Cardin will chair another important hearing on legal services for low-income Americans.

I have already noticed a hearing on improving detainee policy, to be held the Wednesday after the Memorial Day recess. I am also working with Senator Feinstein on another hearing to follow up on the Inspector General's Report on FBI involvement with detainees at Guantanamo Bay. Our interest in these matters extends back to 2003. I still wish that Director Mueller had been more forthcoming when I asked him about these matters at our May 2004 hearing. Had he done so, he might have helped paved the way for Congress to investigate allegations of abuse sooner. The Republican majority refused to subpoena documents relating to the interrogation and treatment of detainees during the summer of 2004 and the Bush administration has delayed four years in providing them. We also still await answers on the destruction of the CIA tapes detailing interrogations.

This week's agenda includes two bills carried over from last week's meeting, as well as the Drug Endangered Children Act, sponsored by Senator Feinstein and Senator Grassley. Senator Specter and I have circulated a substitute to our Runaway and Homeless Youth Protection Act and I hope that bill is now ready to be considered and reported. We also have a resolution regarding National Childhood Cancer Awareness Day and one designating June as National Internet Safety Month.

I should take just a moment to comment on the nominations on the agenda this week. We have the opportunity to report another assistant attorney general nomination for the Department of Justice, that of Elisebeth Cook to head the Office of Legal Policy. We have the nominations of William Lawrence of Indiana and Murray Snow of Arizona to lifetime appointments on the Federal courts in their respective states.

I took the liberty of adding the nomination of William Wilkins III to be United States Attorney for South Carolina. We did not receive the questionnaire and FBI report for

Mr. Wilkins until Monday. When Senator Specter's staff concluded its review on Tuesday, I proceeded to add it to the agenda because of Senator Graham's interest in expediting our consideration. I have been criticized a good deal for seeking to expedite our consideration of President Bush's nominations and do not want to offend any Senator on the Committee, Republican or Democrat. If anyone needs more time to consider the nomination, he or she has the right to hold it over until our next meeting.

With respect to the judicial nominations from Michigan on which I chaired a hearing on May 7, I understand that they have now submitted written responses to the follow up questions propounded to them last Wednesday by the Republican members of the Committee. In my effort to accommodate those Senators, I have not listed those nominations today. When we receive the updated ABA ratings and after Senators have had an opportunity to review the written responses to their questions, I expect to include the Michigan nominees on our next agenda for Committee consideration. My efforts to expedite Committee action on that group of nominees were not as successful as I had hoped, but we should be able to make progress next month.

The Senate did complete consideration of the nomination of Steven Agee to a Virginia vacancy on the Fourth Circuit. When we have received the ABA rating on the President's nomination of Glen Conrad to the other Virginia vacancy on that circuit court, we will see whether there remains time this year, consistent with the Thurmond rule, to consider that nomination, as well.

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Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy
Chairman, Senate Committee on the Judiciary
On S. 2982, the "Runaway and Homeless Youth Protection Act"
Executive Business Meeting
May 22, 2008

I am pleased the Committee is considering important legislation today to reauthorize and improve the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. I thank Senator Specter for his support of this legislation and for joining me in its introduction.

Last month, the Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing to focus the Senate's attention on these problems and to identify and develop solutions to protect runaway and homeless youth. It was the first Senate hearing on these matters in more than a decade. We heard from a distinguished panel of witnesses, some of whom offered moving testimony about their personal experiences with the significant challenges that young people face when they have nowhere to go.

Our witnesses demonstrated that young people can overcome harrowing obstacles and create new opportunities when afforded the opportunity. One witness shared his personal journey of overcoming life as a homeless youth in his teens before becoming a two-time Oscar nominee. Another witness talked about his work with homeless youth at the same Vermont organization that helped him overcome life on the streets. He is on his way to great things. Our panel of witnesses gave useful and insightful suggestions on how to improve the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act to make it more effective. Senator Specter and I have included many of these recommendations in our bill.

The prevalence of homelessness among young people in America is far too high. The problem is not limited to large cities. Its impact is felt strongly in smaller communities and rural areas, including in my home state of Vermont. It affects our young people directly and reverberates throughout our families and communities. That this problem continues in the richest country in the world means that we need to redouble our commitment and our efforts to safeguard our nation's youth. We need to support the dedicated people working in communities across the country to address these problems every day.

Our bill makes improvements to the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act reauthorizations of past years. It doubles funding for states by instituting a minimum grant of \$200,000, which will allow states to better meet the diverse needs of their communities. This bill also requires the Department of Health and Human Services to develop performance

standards for grantees. Providing program guidelines will level the playing field for bidders, ensure consistency among providers, and increase the effectiveness of the services under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. In addition, our legislation develops an incidence study to better estimate the number of runaway and homeless youth and to identify trends. The incidence study would provide more accurate estimates of the runaway and homeless youth population and would help lawmakers make better policy decisions and allow communities to provide better outreach. Senator Specter and I also circulated a substitute amendment yesterday, which makes technical changes to the bill's language and addresses some concerns raised by the Department of Health and Human Services. No young person should be turned away from the important support and services that the grants under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act provide. I thank the Committee for considering this legislation today, and I look forward to moving it quickly to passage on the Senate Floor.

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Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy
Chairman, Senate Committee on the Judiciary on
S. Res. 567, "National Internet Safety Month"
Executive Business Meeting
May 22, 2008

I am proud to be a cosponsor of S. Res.567 sponsored by Senators Murkowski and Whitehouse, designating June 2008 as "National Internet Safety Month" and I am pleased the Committee is considering this resolution today.

More than ever before, our children are using the Internet to communicate through social networking sites and through other means, and it is important and appropriate to educate parents and children about how to use these resources on the Internet safely. This resolution will give us the opportunity to raise awareness among parents and children about how to use the Internet in an appropriate and safe manner.

During this Congress, the Judiciary Committee has considered many important bills that would better protect our children from being victimized by predators on the Internet. Recently, I worked with Senator Schumer on S.431, the Keeping the Internet Devoid of Sexual Predators Act of 2007 (KIDS), which I am pleased passed the Senate this week. This bill would require a convicted sex offender to register his or her email addresses, instant message addresses or other similar Internet identifiers with the National Sex Offender Registry.

In December, the Committee unanimously reported the Internet Safety and Education Act, S.2344, introduced by Senator Menendez, which also takes important strides to teach our children about internet safety. The grant program created under this bill will give educators and parents the tools necessary to teach proper online interactions and promote safe Internet usage to their students and children in an age-appropriate manner. Unfortunately, this important legislation has been stalled in the Senate since December. I hope that any objections to this common sense piece of legislation are lifted and that we can pass Senator Menendez's bill.

I am glad that the Committee has continued to consider and report legislation aimed at keeping our Nation's children safe. Our efforts have been successful, and just this week the Senate passed legislation to reauthorize the important National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, clearing the way for the President to sign that important measure. I hope the Committee will continue those efforts today, and that all of the Senators on the Judiciary Committee join me in supporting the passage of this resolution.

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