

Statement of

The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
Vermont
January 28, 2009

Statement of Chairman Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Consideration of Eric H. Holder Jr.
To Be Attorney General of the United States
Executive Business Meeting
January 28, 2009

Last week, we had the opportunity to follow the mandate from the American people and work together and with the new administration to tackle our problems with a shared sense of resolve. In my view, this Committee stumbled. I asked for the cooperation of all Members, but instead, as is their right, the minority held over the nomination of Eric Holder to be the Attorney General of the United States. I was, as I said, extremely disappointed.

President Obama in his inaugural address to the Nation spoke about the real challenges facing the country and the American people. He urged that we all work for the common good and "proclaim an end to the petty grievances" and "recriminations" and that we "set aside childish things."

President Obama is right. There is work to be done. There are real threats. There are abuses to be undone and rights that need to be restored. We need to get on with the task of remaking America. This is a new week and another chance for us to join together in that spirit.

Eric Holder is a good man, a decent man, a public servant committed to the rule of law. He will be a good Attorney General.

Republicans do not have to take my word for it. They have met with him and questioned him at his hearing. Many have known Mr. Holder for years. The Senate unanimously confirmed him three times for important positions to which he was nominated by President Reagan and President Clinton.

They have heard the endorsements of former FBI Director Louis Freeh, President Bush's homeland security adviser Fran Townsend, Senator Warner of Virginia, Senator Martinez, Senator Hatch and the many Reagan and Bush administration officials who support his nomination.

They have seen the endorsements from the National Association of Police Organizations, the FOP and the entire law enforcement community. Indeed, more than 130 law enforcement and criminal justice organizations, civil rights organizations, victims' advocates, legal practitioners, bar associations, and current and former public officials have urged his prompt confirmation. At

this time in our history, with the challenges we face, we need to move forward, and get our new Attorney General and his team in place.

Mr. Holder has demonstrated that he is committed to restoring the rule of law, and, as President Obama said in his inaugural address "to reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals." I am more convinced than ever that Eric Holder is a person who will reinvigorate the Department of Justice and serve ably as a key member of the President's national security team. He will pursue the Justice Department's vital missions with skill, integrity, independence and a commitment to the rule of law.

I questioned Mr. Holder at his hearing and he gave his commitment to respect the Second Amendment right to bear arms as an individual right guaranteed by our Bill of Rights. I asked him to work with me on a media shield law, and he said that he would do so. I asked him about revitalizing the Freedom of Information Act, and he was agreeable. In his first full day in office, President Obama took action on that score, and once confirmed, Attorney General Holder can bring that disclosure policy to fruition so that the Federal Government is more open to the American people. I asked about anti-crime initiatives, strengthening the Violence Against Women Act, and defending the Voting Rights Act. On all these matters he was straightforward and supportive. I look forward to working with him to provide greater Federal assistance to state and local law enforcement to aggressively target fraud and public corruption.

He said that his priorities will be the safety and security of the American people and reinvigorating the traditional work of the Justice Department in protecting the rights of Americans.

Of course any Senator is free to oppose the nomination and vote against confirmation. In this instance, I think they will be on the wrong side of history. I believe that when we take a step back and look at the big picture and the best interests of the country, Eric Holder is someone who deserves our support and merits our votes. In order to serve effectively as Attorney General he will also need our help. The challenges are too great not to join together to proceed promptly and fairly with Senate consideration of Mr. Holder and the entire Justice Department leadership team that President Obama has selected.

I urge all Members of the Committee, Democrats and Republicans, to join together to do what is right and approve this extraordinary public servant to the critical post for which President Obama has nominated him by voting for Eric H. Holder Jr. to be the 82nd Attorney General of the United States.

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