

Testimony of
Lanny A. Breuer

March 10, 2009

Opening Statement of Lanny A. Breuer
Nominee to be Assistant Attorney General for the Criminal Division

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Specter, and Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the Assistant Attorney General for the Criminal Division.

I would like first to express my appreciation to the Committee's Members and their staffs for considering my nomination. I am grateful for the courtesy that the Committee has afforded me during the nomination process, and, if confirmed, I will look forward to working with you on the many important criminal law enforcement issues facing our country.

Let me also take this moment to introduce my wife, Nancy, who is sitting behind me. She is the love of my life and, without her, I would not be sitting here today. Seated next to Nancy are my two handsome sons, Sam and Ben. I am very proud to have them here.

Also with me is my brother Richard; I am grateful for his support, and for the support of my in-laws and friends, who are here as well.

It is particularly meaningful for me to have my mother, Lilo, here today. My father, Robert, is no longer with us, but he would have been so proud if he had made it to this day.

When I was growing up in Queens in the 1960s and 70s, Elmhurst, the neighborhood in which we lived, was a classic American melting pot. I attended the local public schools throughout my childhood, a son of two of the many first generation immigrants who came to Elmhurst to build their lives. Both of my parents had fled Nazi Europe -- my mother from Germany, my father from Austria -- during World War II.

My mother, who lost her parents in the Holocaust, came here by herself with nothing. But, like so many American success stories, she was able to start a new life in the United States. Having witnessed the devastation wrought by the Nazi regime, my parents instilled in me a distinctly American respect for fairness, the rule of law, and the pursuit of justice. My love for this country and the values it represents runs deep.

As I come before this Committee today, I am mindful of the importance and honor of public service. My first job after law school was as an Assistant District Attorney in the Manhattan District Attorney's office, where I worked under the legendary Robert Morgenthau. I prosecuted crimes across the spectrum -- from murder and domestic assault to armed robbery and white collar crime. I experienced first-hand that the interests of justice are best served when a prosecutor exercises his discretion "without fear or favor" - unwavering in his commitment to the

even-handed but vigilant enforcement of our criminal laws. I owe a great debt to Mr. Morgenthau, whose support for this position I am grateful to have and who gave me an early and formative opportunity to serve on the front lines of combating crime. When he steps down in December after 35 years of extraordinary service, Mr. Morgenthau will leave behind an enduring legacy.

In the years following my service in the Manhattan DA's office, I have remained committed to certain core values - the importance of public service, the need for zealous but honest advocacy, and an abiding pursuit of justice for my clients. Whether in the private sector, where I have co-chaired a leading white collar defense and investigations practice and vice-chaired one of the country's premier pro bono practices, or in the White House, where I sought faithfully to represent the Office of the President, I have done so with these values in mind.

I believe that my experiences as a prosecutor, a private practitioner, and in the Executive Branch, have provided me with the perspective, judgment, and skill to lead the Criminal Division. As you may know, I was privileged to work in private practice, and in the White House, alongside Chuck Ruff. Mr. Ruff, who served the public with distinction as, among other things, u.s. Attorney for the District of Columbia, Acting Deputy Attorney General, and White House Counsel, was a true lion of the law, and an inspiration to a generation of lawyers. He was a consummate professional - a man of strength and integrity. And it is with his example in mind that I would approach my duties if I am confirmed for this important post.

If I become head of the Criminal Division, I will pursue wrongdoing vigorously. Whether it is [ma] crime, public corruption, child exploitation, drug offenses, gang violence, or other crimes, I will be firmly committed to enforcing our criminal laws. And because protecting our national security and fighting terrorism remain paramount, if confirmed I also will work closely with the Department's leadership, the National Security Division, and U.S. Attorneys' Offices around the country to ensure an effective strategy for combating terrorism.

As I consider this opportunity to serve our country, I do so with great reverence for the Department of Justice. If confirmed, it will be my true privilege to serve under Attorney General Eric Holder, for whom I have the utmost respect and admiration. And it would be an honor for me to serve alongside the career professionals at the Department, whose dedication and talent are vital to its mission. I also believe it is essential for the Criminal Division to have close and productive relationships with federal law enforcement and regulatory agencies, as well as to partner with state and local law enforcement officials. All of these dedicated men and women help to keep our communities safe, and they are critical to the work of the Department.

In closing, let me assure this Committee and the American people that, if confirmed, I will work tirelessly to execute my duties with determination and resolve, ever mindful of the government's great power, but firm in my belief that those who violate our criminal laws - whether in the boardroom or the back alley - must be held to account.

Thank you very much. I am pleased to answer any questions the Committee may have.