

Statement of

The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
Vermont
January 21, 2010

Opening Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,
Executive Business Meeting
January 21, 2010

Today we hold our first business meeting of the new year. I welcome back the Committee. I opened our hearing yesterday with a few words about the devastation in Haiti and the leadership being provided by President Obama, Secretary Clinton, USAID Administrator Shah, General Fraser of the U.S. Southern Command, and all the hardworking people here and on the ground in Haiti. Recovering from this disaster is a daunting challenge for the people of Haiti, but Vermonters and all Americans have opened their hearts and are sharing generously, and we will continue to do so. It is good to see former Presidents Bush and Clinton leading a joint, nonpartisan effort, as well.

As I noted at our hearing yesterday, this is a time for all of us to join and work together. I hope that our agenda today provides us with opportunities to do that and to make progress.

We will start with the First Circuit nominee from Rhode Island who was held over since our last meeting on December 17. Then I would like to turn to the North Carolina nominees to fill the longstanding vacancies on the Fourth Circuit. Their hearing was December 16, at which Senator Burr and Senator Hagan testified in support of them. Just as I sought to expedite President Bush's efforts to break impasses--such as the longstanding Sixth Circuit vacancies from Michigan - with nominees supported by both sides of the aisle and to expedite their consideration, I am trying to do so here. I urge all Senators to join in our efforts by allowing these outstanding nominees to be reported today.

After we complete our work on the nominations, I would like to turn to the bipartisan Boys & Girls Clubs Centennial Reauthorization Act of 2009, which I crafted with Senator Sessions, Senator Kohl and, of course, Senator Hatch, a longtime champion of these efforts. We all know that it is important for young people to have safe havens and opportunities to help them avoid the dangers of gangs, drugs, and crime. The Boys & Girls Clubs of America provide this kind of positive environment for young people, and they have repeatedly demonstrated over the years that investing in the future of our young people yields positive returns for our communities. This bill will help us to continue to support these important programs by authorizing Justice Department grants through 2015.

As our country recovers from this economic crisis, many organizations around the country are having a hard time financially, and the Boys & Girls Clubs are no exception. At the same time, participation in these clubs has never been higher, and it continues to increase, as tough economic times increase the need for children to have a good place to go. I believe funding is well spent at the community level where the positive impact on our youth is felt most directly, so it is particularly important that we continue to support the Boys and Girls club in this time of economic challenges.

This is not a Democratic or Republican idea; it is just an idea that makes sense. I hope the Committee will act to favorably report this bill.

I then hope we are able to make progress on three additional items: Senator Webb's criminal justice commission proposal, Representative Cummings' witness protection legislation, and Senator Harkin's Safe Babies Act that we have previously considered and reported favorably. I understand that substitutes have been circulated and will be offered for each of these measures, and it is my hope that those substitutes will clear the way for prompt consideration and adoption. If there remain amendments that need to be offered, I hope we can proceed to consider them expeditiously so that these measures can be reported with bipartisan support.

As I recognize Senator Sessions for brief opening remarks, I congratulate him and the University of Alabama Crimson Tide for winning the college football national championship.

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Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.)
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee
On S. 714, "The National Criminal Justice Commission Act"
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Today, we have the opportunity to consider a criminal justice initiative that has bipartisan support. At Senator Webb's request, I have again included his proposal to establish a criminal justice commission to analyze our criminal justice system and make recommendations to us on how to make it work more fairly, efficiently, and effectively. Senator Webb has worked very hard over the last several months to make this legislation responsive to concerns raised by law enforcement, state and local government officials, and Committee members from both sides of the aisle. In response to those concerns, he has offered a substitute bill with the hope that we can move this important piece of legislation through Committee with the strong bi-partisan support it deserves. I want to thank Senator Specter and Senator Durbin for their work with Senator Webb to bring this bill through Committee.

The National Criminal Justice Commission Act offers an opportunity to examine our criminal justice system, identify what we are doing right, and what we can do better. As a former prosecutor, I have long been interested in finding ways to improve our criminal justice system, whether through improved policing techniques, additional resources for prosecution, or

innovative ways to prevent crime and improve reentry to our communities for those leaving prison.

I am proud of the work we have accomplished through legislation such as the Second Chance Act, and I am continuing to seek innovative solutions through legislation like the Juvenile Justice and Detention Prevention Reauthorization Act.

I believe strongly in securing tough and appropriate prison sentences for people who break our laws. But it is also important that we do everything we can to prevent crime and improve the reentry process so that we can start to reverse the dangerous cycle of recidivism and violence. I hope that the findings of a National Criminal Justice Commission will help give us the information we need to do that.

I want to thank Senator Webb for responding to concerns raised by the law enforcement community, and by Senators Feinstein and Klobuchar, among others.

While I share Senator Webb's sense that these are important issues that need to be addressed, we need to do so in a way that takes into consideration many perspectives, including the important insights of State and local law enforcement. With bipartisan cosponsors including Senator Hatch and Senator Graham, I look forward to a good discussion about this proposed commission.

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