

Statement of  
**The Honorable Patrick Leahy**

United States Senator  
Vermont  
March 18, 2010

Opening Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),  
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,  
Executive Business Meeting  
March 18, 2010

The last couple of weeks we have made some bipartisan progress. I want to thank the members of the Committee for their cooperation. If we can assemble a quorum quickly this morning we can make more progress.

We have judicial nominees from states with Democratic Senators, Republican Senators and with a Senator from each party. All the home state Senators are supportive of President Obama's nominees. We also have U.S. Attorney nominees for Florida and South Carolina to report.

This week we celebrate Sunshine Week. This is a time to recognize the importance of open government. Thomas Jefferson observed that "information is the currency of democracy." His words are a timeless reminder of the critical role that freedom of information has in our democracy. Earlier this week, Senator Cornyn and I introduced another bipartisan measure to improve the Freedom of Information Act. We call that bill the Faster FOIA Act. It will improve the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act across our Government. It will create a bipartisan commission to study the root causes of agency FOIA delays and to make recommendations on how best to reduce FOIA backlogs. I would like to include it on our next agenda, so that we can report it without delay. Open government benefits all Americans, and I hope this is something we can all work on together and support.

On today's agenda are two bipartisan bills I introduced with Senator Lugar. These bills make small but important improvements to our laws to recognize those who serve the United States, and to encourage refugees and immigrants to serve their adopted country.

The Refugee Opportunity Act creates an exception to the physical presence requirement for refugees who, during their first year in the United States, accept employment overseas with our Armed Services or with a Federal agency to further U.S. policy. This legislation would assist refugees in the process of building a new life by expanding employment opportunities and would allow the Federal Government to benefit from refugees' language or other skills. I thank Senator Feingold and Senator Cardin for cosponsoring this bill.

The Return of Talent Act would permit lawful permanent residents to return for a period of time to their country of nationality to assist in recovery efforts following a natural disaster or armed conflict without counting that time against them for purposes of citizenship. This bill is

especially timely given the recent earthquakes in Haiti and Chile, and I am glad to join Senator Lugar to promote a policy that encourages those on the path to United States citizenship to engage in such meaningful work. I know that Senator Durbin has long been interested in these matters, especially for health care providers who serve in areas in need.

Substitute amendments for both bills have been circulated, and I understand my staff has been working with the staffs of other Committee members of both parties to address any concerns about these bills. I appreciate all of the cooperation and constructive discussion so far, and I am hopeful we can report these bills very soon.

This week marks the 30th anniversary of the Refugee Act. This week, I also introduced the Refugee Protection Act, along with a number of other Senators, including Senator Durbin. We look forward to continuing the work of Senator Kennedy and considering this important measure in the weeks ahead.

I hope today that we can complete our work on the Discount Pricing Consumer Protection Act that Senator Kohl introduced, and which is cosponsored by nine members of this Committee. This legislation would reinstate the per se ban against resale price maintenance agreements. Some members may be leaving soon for the jobs bill signing ceremony at the White House this morning, so I hope we can complete our work expeditiously.

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