

Statement of

# **The Honorable Patrick Leahy**

United States Senator  
Vermont  
April 20, 2010

Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),  
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,  
Hearing On "Oversight Of The U.S. Department Of Justice, Civil Rights Division"  
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Today we welcome Assistant Attorney General Tom Perez as we continue our oversight of the Department of Justice. This hearing comes just one week after this Committee heard testimony from Attorney General Eric Holder. The Attorney General has called the Civil Rights Division the "crown jewel" of the Justice Department. I support that sentiment; the Civil Rights Division is charged with the enormous responsibility of protecting all Americans from all forms of discrimination.

The Justice Department under the Bush administration amassed one of the worst civil rights enforcement records in modern American history. I am heartened to see that in just one year, the restoration of the Civil Rights Division is under way. This was a tall order for a storied division, with a long record of independence and a tradition of vigorous civil rights enforcement.

The progress made in the Civil Rights Division is in no small part due to the leadership and commitment of Assistant Attorney General Tom Perez. I only wish he was confirmed sooner. Notwithstanding the partisanship that held up his confirmation, Mr. Perez has hit the ground running, and has demonstrated his pledge to follow in the footsteps of his mentor and former boss, the late Senator Ted Kennedy.

A few examples caught my attention. In December, a Federal grand jury issued six indictments in connection with the fatal racially-motivated beating of Luis Ramirez. Last year, I fought to have our Federal laws against hate crimes strengthened. This tragic murder reminds us that hate crimes affect more than just the victims of a particular act of violence.

Last month, a Federal judge sentenced a Tennessee man to 183 months for vandalizing an Islamic mosque by painting swastikas and the phrase "White Power," and for subsequently burning down a sacred place of worship. Just last week, an Arkansas man was sentenced to 10 years in Federal prison for conspiring to murder dozens of African-Americans, including then-Senator and presidential candidate Barack Obama, because of their race. Although we would all like to believe that crimes motivated by hate based on race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability do not still occur in our society, these examples demonstrate that they continue to be an issue for confronted by the Civil Rights Division.

These cases are representative of why our Nation needs a strong Civil Rights Division. More importantly, they are representative of the Division's restoration. We must remain committed to bringing such perpetrators to justice, and to protecting all communities from discrimination in the pursuit of a more perfect union. I welcome Mr. Perez here today. We look forward to receiving his testimony.

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