

Statement of

The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
United States Senate
June 12, 2012

I welcome our Attorney General Holder back to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The mission of the Department of Justice has always been to protect and safeguard all Americans-- to keep Americans safe from terrorism and other national security threats, to keep our communities safe from crime, and to safeguard the rights and liberties that make us American. When Attorney General Holder took over more than three years ago, he inherited a Department that had lost its way and had lost its focus on these core missions. His leadership has helped to restore the Department, and it has made great strides in each of these areas.

The Department's success in holding terrorists accountable and helping to disrupt threats to national security has been remarkable. The results can be seen in the growing number of convictions and lengthy sentences handed down by our Federal courts.

At the same time, however, we must ensure that our national security tools are used in a way that is consistent with our Constitution, laws and values. I remain concerned that Congress has not yet received all of the information it has requested regarding the legal rationale for the targeted killing of U.S. citizens overseas, and I renew my request that the relevant Office of Legal Counsel memoranda be provided. Moreover, as Congress considers reauthorizing the surveillance provisions enacted by the FISA Amendments Act, I will work to ensure that the constitutional rights and privacy interests of Americans are adequately protected.

While focused on safeguarding our national security, the Department has also had historic success in keeping our communities safe from crime. At a time of economic crisis and shrinking state and local law enforcement budgets, many expected violent crime to skyrocket. Instead, crime rates across the country have continued to decline. The commitment of the Department, along with the President and the Congress, to continue Federal assistance to state and local law enforcement has been critical to these successes. The Department's tough and effective stewardship of Federal law enforcement has helped to keep crime rates low and Americans safe.

The hard work and good advice of those in the Department who work every day to help women victimized by domestic and sexual assault was also crucial in helping those of us in the Senate craft a bipartisan Violence Against Women Act reauthorization bill that protects all victims. The professionals at the Department who do so much to help victims of trafficking have also helped us to craft strong bipartisan legislation to reauthorize the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and legislation to reauthorize the Second Chance Act to help prisoners become productive citizens.

The Justice Department has worked hand in hand with us on fraud prevention and enforcement,

and as a result we have seen record fraud recoveries and increased fraud arrests and convictions over the last few years.

I also appreciate how under the Attorney General's leadership the Civil Rights Division has been restored and transformed. Beyond combating discrimination in mortgage lending and protecting the rights of our men and women in uniform against employment abuses and wrongful foreclosures, we have seen this Department fiercely safeguard the civil rights of all Americans. I know that the restoration of the Civil Rights Division has been a tall order, but the Department's crown jewel is, again, enforcing Americans' civil rights law in a fair and evenhanded way.

I applaud the Department's continued efforts to ensure that Americans do not have their constitutional right to vote taken away by efforts at voter suppression and disenfranchisement. Such barriers to voting recall a dark time in our Nation's history. We will never forget when Americans were attacked by dogs, blasted with water hoses, or beaten by mobs simply for attempting to register to vote. We remember a time when recalcitrant state officials used discriminatory devices such as poll taxes, grandfather clauses, and literacy tests to exclude American citizens from our democracy. We cannot backslide on the progress we have made protecting every American's right to vote.

In this presidential election year, when there may be a temptation to try to score political points, I urge the Members of this Committee to help the Department better fulfill its duties to protect Americans and safeguard their rights and to engage in responsible oversight efforts.

I thank the men and women of the Department of Justice who work hard every day to keep us safe and uphold the rule of law and thank Attorney General Holder for his extraordinary service under trying circumstances in challenging times.

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