

Statement of Leslie R. Caldwell
Senate Judiciary Committee
February 11, 2014

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

Let me take a moment to introduce my partner, Michele Kohler, and her daughter Hannah Ryan, who are sitting behind me. Also here with me are my niece Megan Caldwell, my fantastic administrative assistant Donna Weekes, and several other close friends and colleagues. I thank them all for their support and for being here today. I also thank my brothers Bruce and Douglas and their wives Teresa and Jean, who were unable to be here today.

I know that if they had made it to this day, my parents, Key and Caryl Caldwell, would have been so proud to see their daughter sitting here before this Committee. My father Key was a Tennessee native, who at the age of 19 enlisted in the Army Air Corps in World War II. He became a B-24 bomber pilot, assigned to the 8th Air Force, based in England. After many successful missions over Germany, his plane was shot down. He managed to keep the plane airborne just long enough to leave German airspace, and landed in a field in Switzerland. All but one of his crew survived. He was detained by the Swiss, but escaped, and with the help of the French Resistance, made his way to safety. While my father went on to become an engineer and a successful businessman in Pittsburgh, he was also a very humble man. In fact, I never even knew the story I just shared with you until I was well into adulthood, when I stumbled upon my Dad's war diary. When I asked him with amazement about his exploits, he said very matter of factly that all he had done was serve his country as best he could. He never spoke of it again.

My mother Caryl was a remarkable woman who set an example for me every day of her life. She was raised in a single parent home in a poor neighborhood on Pittsburgh's north side. Though she was the valedictorian of her high school class, there was no money for college. So she took a full-time job as a secretary in the Legal Department of U.S. Steel, and attended the University of Pittsburgh at night. At around the same time when she met and married my Dad, she graduated from Pitt summa cum laude and as a member of Phi Beta Kappa. Though she never again worked in a traditional job, she raised three children, and also played leadership roles in several community organizations, while volunteering many hours as an adult literacy teacher. I like to think that if she had been born 30 years later, my Mom would be the one sitting before this Committee.

Our parents taught my brothers and me that the values that matter most in life are integrity, fairness, hard work, and humility. As I sit before this Committee, I am especially mindful of those values, and of the honor of public service, to which I have dedicated much of my career.

As a young lawyer, I was fortunate enough to get a job as an Assistant United States Attorney in the Eastern District of New York, in Brooklyn. New York was a very different city then. Homicides and other drug-related violence were at an all-time high. As a young narcotics prosecutor, I was tasked with prosecuting members of a drug organization that was responsible for an especially notorious crime: the execution –style murder of a uniformed New York City Police Officer named Edward Byrne. More than 20 years later, I still consider the conviction of the druglord who ordered Officer Byrne’s murder as perhaps my proudest professional accomplishment. During my 10 years in Brooklyn I prosecuted and tried many types of cases, including large-scale narcotics trafficking, violent organized crime and gangs, corrupt public officials, and securities fraud. During that time, I had the privilege to serve under three U.S. Attorneys who all understood that the interests of justice are best served when government remains mindful of its great power, and when enforcement is vigorous and swift, but fair.

In 1999, I was asked by former FBI Director Bob Mueller, who was then the U.S. Attorney in San Francisco, to join his team as chief white collar crime prosecutor. Working for Director Mueller was one of the finest experiences of my professional life. It is with his example in mind that I would approach my duties if I am confirmed as Assistant Attorney General. In 2002, I was honored when then Criminal Division Assistant Attorney General Mike Chertoff asked me to lead a task force that would investigate the collapse of Enron. For more than 2 years I was privileged to lead an extraordinary team of prosecutors, FBI agents and IRS agents, and to work with lawyers from the SEC, CFTC and other agencies as we unraveled that fascinating and complex case.

I believe that my experience as a prosecutor of nearly every type of federal crime, and in such diverse cities as New York, San Francisco, Washington D.C. and Houston, as well as my leadership and management experience in both government and private practice, have provided me with the perspective, judgment, and skill to lead the Criminal Division. If I become head of the Criminal Division, I will do my best to ensure the vigorous enforcement of our criminal laws, and to apply them with equal force whether the wrongdoing is in a boardroom, across a computer network, or on a street corner.

I am deeply honored to have this opportunity to serve our country, and to once again work alongside the dedicated career professionals that form the backbone of the Department of Justice. I thank you again for considering my nomination and I am pleased to respond to any questions you may have.