

Opening Statement of Senator Sheldon Whitehouse
- Nominations Hearing, September 9, 2009 -

Today we will consider four nominations to the Federal bench. Judge Joseph Greenaway has been nominated to the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit; Roberto Lange has been nominated to the U.S. District Court for the District of South Dakota; Judge Irene Berger has been nominated to the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of West Virginia; and Judge Charlene Honeywell has been nominated to the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida. We also will consider the nomination of Ignacia S. Moreno to be Assistant Attorney General for the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the Department of Justice.

I would like to welcome each of the nominees, their families, and their friends to the United States Senate. I of course also would like to welcome those of my colleagues who are here to introduce the nominees.

Voting to confirm an individual to the Federal bench is one of the most important and lasting decisions that a Senator can make. Every day, Federal judges make decisions that affect the lives of all Americans. As I said to Justice Sotomayor during her recent confirmation debate, judges must respect the role of Congress as representatives of the American people; decide cases based on the law and the facts; not prejudge any case, but listen to every party that comes before them; respect precedent; and limit themselves to the issues that the Court must decide. I hope each judicial nominee we hear from today understands the importance of those principles.

Heading the Environment and Natural Resources Division at the Department of Justice is also a weighty responsibility. Now a hundred years old, the Division is our nation's most important enforcer of our environmental laws. Its dedicated career employees, including the current Acting Assistant Attorney General, John Cruden, use our courts to protect the environment our children and grandchildren will inherit. I will expect today's nominee to support that tradition, particularly now that the Division will not have to expend precious resources warding off efforts by Bush Administration officials to weaken enforcement of our nation's environmental laws.

Each of today's nominees has an impressive record of achievement. I hope that my Republican colleagues will allow prompt consideration of their nominations. We need good judges for our system of justice to function and we need top leadership to be in place at the Department of Justice if we expect proper enforcement of our laws. Too many of President Obama's nominees are currently stalled in the Senate. I hope we will see those delays end soon.

In the interest of efficiency, let me outline how this hearing will proceed. After the Ranking Member's remarks, home-state Senators in attendance will, by order of seniority, introduce the nominees. We then will have two panels. The first will be Judge Greenaway, and the second will be the remaining nominees. Senators on the committee will have five minute rounds in which to question each panel.

With that, I turn to the Ranking Member, Senator Sessions