

**Prepared Statement of the Honorable Larry Thompson
Before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary
On the Nomination of Senator Jeff Sessions to serve as Attorney General
January 10, 2017**

One of my favorite descriptions of public service is former President Theodore Roosevelt's. He praised the person who actually enters the "Arena" and, while suffering the slings and arrows of criticism, continues to strive "valiantly" to serve the public's interests. It is my experience that there can be no public service without public criticism. Senator Jeff Sessions has seen his fair share of such criticism. But there can be no doubt that his life of public service and his clear record of achievement in strong law enforcement and bipartisan legislation eminently qualify him to serve as Attorney General.

I first came to know Senator Sessions more than thirty years ago, when we were both young prosecutors. He was the United States Attorney in Mobile and I was the United States Attorney in Atlanta. We sometimes shared a hotel room on Department of Justice travel to stretch our limited per diems. We were young prosecutors trying to save money. During the lifetime since then, we've shared personal and professional counsel. And I have been honored to witness my good friend's accomplishments as a prosecutor and a legislator.

Among his many accomplishments as a federal prosecutor and United States Senator, two clearly define the Senator as a leader with a commitment to both strong law enforcement and equal justice for all.

First, as United States Attorney, Senator Sessions successfully prosecuted Alabama Ku Klux Klan "Grand Titan" Bennie Jack Hays, who ordered his son, Henry Hays, to kill an African-American man. Henry Hays and James "Tiger" Knowles did the cowardly deed by abducting, torturing, and murdering a 19 year-old.

As is common in cases like this with serious civil rights overtones, the investigation was a joint federal-state effort. The state District Attorney noted that the investigative power of the FBI and a federal grand jury were needed. He also noted that when he reached out to Senator Sessions, the Senator responded: "Tell me what you need and you'll have it." Tiger Knowles pled guilty in federal court to a civil rights violation and received a life sentence to be served in federal prison. Senator Sessions, however, pressed to ensure that Hays was tried in state court, where prosecutors could seek the death penalty. Hays was found guilty and received the death sentence. As Alabama Attorney General, Senator Sessions successfully argued to uphold Hays' sentence.

Here's a second mark of Senator Sessions' commitment both to strong law enforcement and justice for all: his record of bipartisan leadership in the Senate, especially on criminal justice issues. Senator Sessions' leadership was instrumental in the passage of the Fair Sentencing Act in 2010. This landmark legislation reduced the penalties for crack possession which unfairly targeted African-Americans and brought the penalties more in line with the penalties for powder cocaine.

This was a tremendous accomplishment. Senator Sessions first introduced the legislation in 2001 to reduce the unjust disparity in sentencing. He said: "I think we're at a point where this 100-to-1 disparity which does fall heavier on the African-American community simply because that's where crack is most often used, has got to be fixed." Senator Sessions worked to reduce this disparity for nine long years before he was joined by Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois in a successful bipartisan effort to enact the legislation. Wade Henderson, President of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, praised Senator Sessions in 2010 for his "steadfast commitment" to ending this "racial discriminatory disparity."

That Senator Sessions can view law enforcement and the Department of Justice issues through a bipartisan lens was further demonstrated when he was one of only 17 Republican senators to vote to confirm President Obama's Attorney General Eric Holder.

These remarkable accomplishments demonstrate that Senator Sessions' deep experience as a federal prosecutor and United States Senator will bring much needed strong leadership to the Department of Justice. I am confident that, as Attorney General, Senator Sessions will impartially and vigorously enforce our laws. He knows that his role as Attorney General is to enforce the law and no longer to write it as a legislator. He will administer equal justice for all without regard to person. I have no doubt that he will enforce the law in favor of all Americans' civil rights—regardless of their positions or perspectives. In short, he will lead the Department with the integrity and commitment that have marked his service as prosecutor and legislator.

Indeed, Senator Sessions' entire life in the "Arena" of public service reflects these key characteristics of fair play and humility. While being battered at times, he has worked hard, always with an eye to advancing the public good—and he has succeeded. Senator Jeff Sessions, a good man, deserves confirmation as our nation's next Attorney General.