

**Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,
Hearing On Oversight Of The Department Of Justice
March 6, 2013**

This week is the anniversary of “Bloody Sunday” when voting rights marchers, including now-Congressman John Lewis, were beaten by state troopers as they attempted to cross the Edmund Pettis Bridge in Selma. Attorney General Holder spoke this weekend about living up to our founding ideals and the power of our legal system. The law protects the rights of all Americans. That is what this Attorney General and the Justice Department he leads are dedicated to doing.

In 2009, the Attorney General worked with us in Congress to pass landmark hate crimes legislation to address crimes committed against Americans because of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The Justice Department is enforcing that law. This week the President will sign historic legislation building upon the Violence Against Women Act and the Trafficking Victims Protection Act to protect all victims of abuse. The Justice Department will implement those laws.

And the Justice Department is defending the protections provided by section 5 of the Voting Rights Act to ensure that all Americans have the right to vote and to have their votes matter. This Committee played a key role in reauthorizing the Voting Rights Act six years ago. After nearly 20 hearings before the House and Senate Judiciary Committees, we found that modern day barriers to voting persist in our country. We passed and President Bush signed the current extension of the Voting Rights Act in order to safeguard the fundamental rights of all Americans.

I commend the Attorney General, FBI Director Mueller and all those who work every day to keep Americans safe. The follow up attack to 9/11 that so many predicted has not occurred--not on this President’s watch. Constant vigilance is part of the reason. I also thank the Attorney General for reaching out, not only to me, but to Senator Grassley on issues of national security.

While the Department’s success in disrupting threats to national security has been remarkable and its efforts to hold terrorists accountable commendable, I remain deeply troubled that this Committee has not yet received the materials I have requested regarding the legal rationale for the targeted killing of United States citizens overseas. I am not alone in my frustration or in my waning patience. The relevant Office of Legal Counsel memoranda should have been provided to members of this Committee. It is our responsibility to ensure that the tools at Government’s disposal are used in a way that is consistent with our Constitution, laws and values.

We have worked together effectively to help keep Americans safe from crime and to help crime victims rebuild their lives. Together, we have worked to strengthen Federal law enforcement and to support state and local law enforcement, and crime rates have experienced a historic decline despite the struggling economy.

We have worked together to fight fraud and corporate wrongdoing, which had such a devastating impact on the American people in the recent economic downturn. Congress passed the Fraud Enforcement and Recovery Act, which Senator Grassley and I drafted together, and important

new anti-fraud provisions as part of the Affordable Care Act and the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. Armed with these new tools, the Justice Department has broken records over the last several years for civil and criminal fraud recoveries and has increased the number of fraud prosecutions.

This Committee has also worked with the Department to try to ensure that the criminal justice system works as it should. This month marks the 50th anniversary of the seminal Supreme Court decision in *Gideon v. Wainwright*, which affirmed that no person should face prosecution without the assistance of a lawyer. I am encouraged by the Justice Department's Access to Justice Office but so much more needs to be done to ensure justice for all. I was also glad to see the announcement of a joint initiative to help standardize and improve forensic science across the country, incorporating many of the ideas from my Criminal Justice and Forensic Science Reform Act.

I appreciate the Attorney General joining me in recognizing the mounting problem of our growing prison population. This is having devastating consequences at a time of shrinking budgets at all levels of government. We all must do more to find constructive ways to solve it. Turning away from excessive sentences and mandatory minimums for nonviolent offenders would be a good start.

When the Senate confirmed Attorney General Holder four years ago, the Department of Justice was still reeling from scandal, mismanagement, and findings of impermissible politicization. Since that time, the credibility of the Justice Department among the American people and in courtrooms throughout the country has increased dramatically, and the morale of its hard-working agents, prosecutors, and professionals has been largely restored.

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