

**Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee,
Hearing on the Nomination of Loretta Lynch to Serve as
Attorney General of the United States
January 28, 2015**

It is a pleasure to welcome Loretta Lynch to this Committee. Ms. Lynch is smart, tough, hard-working, and independent. She is a true prosecutor's prosecutor. Her qualifications are beyond reproach, which is why she has been unanimously confirmed by the Senate twice before to serve as the top Federal prosecutor based in Brooklyn, New York. I look forward to another swift confirmation process for Ms. Lynch.

As the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, Ms. Lynch has brought terrorists and cyber-criminals to justice, obtained convictions against corrupt public officials from both political parties, and fought tirelessly against violent crime and financial fraud. Ms. Lynch has remained determined to protect the rights of victims. She has worked hard to improve the relationship between law enforcement and the communities they serve – as evidenced by the fact that her nomination enjoys strong support from both. She has prosecuted those who have committed crimes against police officers, as well as police officers who have committed crimes. Her record shows that as Attorney General, Ms. Lynch will effectively, fairly, and independently enforce the law.

Born in North Carolina, Ms. Lynch is the daughter of a Baptist preacher and a school librarian. We are honored to have members of her family with us today. I know she will be introducing them to us momentarily. Ms. Lynch grew up hearing her family speak about living in the Jim Crow South, but she never lost faith that the way to obtain justice is through our legal system. Her nomination is historic. When confirmed as the 83rd Attorney General of the United States, she will be the first African American woman to lead the Department of Justice. I can think of no one more deserving of that honor.

Ms. Lynch will lead a Justice Department that faces complex challenges. Nearly one-third of its budget goes to the Bureau of Prisons, draining vital resources from nearly all other public safety priorities. A significant factor leading to this budget imbalance is the unnecessary creation of more and more mandatory minimum sentences. Passing new mandatory minimum laws has become a convenient way for lawmakers to claim that they are tough on crime – even when there is no evidence that these sentences keep us safer. That policy fallacy is one of the reasons we have the largest prison population in the world. And it is why I oppose all mandatory minimums. We must work together on thoughtful solutions to address our mass incarceration problem.

The Justice Department also needs strong leadership to keep up with the rapid development of technology. We must stay ahead of the curve to prevent and fight threats to cybersecurity and data privacy. The growing threat of cybercrime is very real but so is the specter of unchecked government intrusion into our private lives – particularly dragnet surveillance programs directed at American citizens. The intelligence community faces a critical deadline this June when three sections of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act are set to expire. We must protect our national security and our civil liberties. We must work together to reform our Nation's surveillance laws so we can achieve both goals and restore the public's trust.

The next Attorney General will play an essential role in protecting all Americans on these issues and many others.

The President's selection for Attorney General—no matter the President—deserves to be considered swiftly, fairly, and on her own record. A role this important cannot be used as yet another Washington political football. I am confident that if we stay focused on Ms. Lynch's impeccable qualifications and fierce independence, she will be quickly confirmed by the Senate. Ms. Lynch deserves a fair, thoughtful, and respectful confirmation process – and the American people deserve an Attorney General like Ms. Lynch.

Ms. Lynch, I thank you for your years of public service, and I look forward to your testimony.

#####