

**Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee
On Judicial Nominations
May 13, 2014**

The Judiciary Committee welcomes seven judicial nominees, two for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit and five for the U.S. District Court for the Northern and Middle Districts of Georgia. I thank Senator Blumenthal for chairing this important hearing. I am always happy to share with other members the opportunity to chair hearings on the many important issues we handle on the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Today, we will hear first from Julie Carnes and Jill Pryor, who have been nominated to fill vacancies on the Eleventh Circuit. We will then hear from the five district court nominees: Leslie Abrams to the Middle District of Georgia and Michael Boggs, Mark Cohen, Leigh May, and Eleanor Ross to the Northern District of Georgia. Some of these positions have remained vacant for far too long. For instance, the two Eleventh Circuit seats are judicial emergency vacancies, as are two of the Northern District of Georgia seats.

Some press accounts have described six of these nominees as being a “package deal” that was negotiated between the Georgia Senators and the President. I have noted before that there is no “deal” negotiated with me as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee or with any of the other Senators. The constitutional responsibility of advice and consent resides with each individual Senator, and there is no such thing as a binding deal that negates each Senator’s responsibility to determine the fitness of a judicial nominee for a lifetime appointment.

Nor should any Senator be making up their minds about nominees without allowing the process to run its course. The purpose of these public hearings is to allow Senators to ask questions and raise issues about the nominees’ background and their fitness for a lifetime appointment on the Federal bench. I have always maintained that home state Senators be consulted by the President regarding nominations made to their states, and following that consultation and review of their backgrounds, those nominees receive a hearing.

Moreover, the purpose of these hearings is to produce a record by which Senators can make an informed decision about these nominees. The Committee welcomes written testimony from anyone who has first-hand knowledge of a nominee’s fitness to serve as a judge. I look forward to reviewing the nominees’ answers to Senators’ questions asked here today and in writing. I expect to submit written questions to the nominees to further explore issues that will be discussed at this hearing.

I note that today’s slate of nominees includes five women – I cannot recall the last time when so many women were seated at the witness table. The President has many critics but I believe he has done an outstanding job increasing the diversity of our Federal bench during his tenure and I commend him for continuing to do so. From district court nominees to circuit court nominees and even to his two Supreme Court Justice nominees, this President has made it a priority to have our federal bench reflect the people it serves. I welcome the nominees and thank their families for being with us today.

#####