

Statement of
The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
Vermont
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STATEMENT OF SENATOR PATRICK LEAHY (D-VT.),
CHAIRMAN, SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
HEARING ON OVERSIGHT OF THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
MARCH 30, 2011

Today the Judiciary Committee hears from Director Robert Mueller of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

This fall, Director Mueller will complete his ten-year term overseeing the FBI. He took over just days before the attacks of September 11, 2001. Since then, he has overseen a major transformation of the Bureau. While the FBI continues to perform all the functions of a Federal law enforcement agency, it has also greatly increased its role in ensuring our national security. There have certainly been false starts and growing pains, but Director Mueller has managed this transformation of a large and well established agency with great professionalism and focus.

Perhaps most admirably, Director Mueller has aggressively pursued both law enforcement and national security objectives while maintaining a strong commitment to the values and freedoms we hold most dear as Americans. In commemorating the 100th anniversary of the FBI several years ago, Director Mueller said:

"It is not enough to stop the terrorist - we must stop him while maintaining his civil liberties. It is not enough to catch the criminal - we must catch him while respecting his civil rights. It is not enough to prevent foreign countries from stealing our secrets - we must prevent that from happening while still upholding the rule of law. The rule of law, civil liberties, and civil rights - these are not our burdens. They are what make us better. And they are what have made us better for the past 100 years."

I agree. I have tried to advance these same objectives with carefully calibrated criminal justice legislation like the Justice For All Act, and national security legislation like the USA PATRIOT Act reauthorization proposal that recently passed through this Committee. It is gratifying that the Director of the FBI shares my commitment to working to keep all Americans safe, while preserving the values that make us Americans.

I also appreciate that the FBI has shown signs recently of real progress on issues vital to this Committee and to the country. Obviously, national security and counter-terrorism are central to the FBI's mission. It has been heartening to see recently a steady stream of important arrests of those who would do this country harm.

For instance, earlier this month, the FBI arrested Kevin Harpham for planning to bomb a march in honor of Martin Luther King Day in Spokane, Washington. Mr. Harpham reportedly had ties to white supremacist groups, and the plot he is accused of planning came dangerously close to succeeding. The results could have been devastating. I commend the FBI for making this arrest, which shows the continuing threat posed by domestic terrorism and makes very clear that no one ethnic group has a monopoly on terror.

In the last Congress, we made great strides toward more effective fraud prevention and enforcement. I worked hard with Senator Grassley and others to craft and pass the Fraud Enforcement and Recovery Act, the most expansive anti-fraud legislation in more than a decade. That important legislation added resources and statutory tools for effective prevention, detection, and enforcement of mortgage fraud and financial fraud. We also worked hard to ensure that both the healthcare reform legislation and Wall Street reform legislation passed last year included important new tools for cracking down on fraud. Senator Grassley and I are hard at work now on new legislation to provide greater support for aggressive enforcement of our fraud laws.

I am pleased to see that the FBI has been taking advantage of this heightened support for fraud enforcement, greatly increasing the number of agents investigating fraud, leading to more fraud arrests and greater fraud recoveries. I am glad that the FBI has also maintained its historic focus on combating corruption. I hope the Bureau will remain committed to cracking down on the kinds of fraud that contributed so greatly to our current financial crisis and on corruption that undermines Americans' faith in their democracy.

I have been heartened to see that the FBI's statistics continue to show reductions in violent crime nationwide despite the painful recession. I commend the FBI on its good work in combating violent crime. I hope that Congress will continue to provide urgently needed assistance to state and local law enforcement, which has been vital to keeping crime down throughout the country.

Of course, areas of major concern remain, including the FBI's continuing struggles with modernizing its technology and information-sharing systems. This Committee must continue its vigorous oversight. I hope that today's hearing will shed light on those areas where the FBI is continuing to excel, as well as those areas that need further attention.

I thank Director Mueller for returning to the Committee, for his responsiveness to our oversight efforts, and for his personal example and impressive leadership over the past decade in returning the FBI to its best traditions. I thank the hardworking men and women of the FBI and look forward to the Director's testimony.

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