

## **Senate Judiciary Opening Statement regarding Pam Bondi**

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Pam Bondi is one of the finest, most complete prosecutors I have ever worked with. She became an intern and later an Assistant State Attorney in Tampa where I was her supervising chief for many years. Then, twenty years later when she was elected Florida's Attorney General, she selected me to be her Statewide Prosecutor. I have known Ms. Bondi for almost thirty-five years. I wish to share with you my observations and experiences of her as a colleague, her supervisor, her co-counsel, and her Statewide Prosecutor.

When it comes to criminal prosecution, Pam Bondi is unquestionably an "ace". Prosecuting simple battery and DUI to first degree capital murder cases, she has experienced almost everything within the American criminal justice system. From going to the scenes of the tragedy, to the courtrooms, to the witness rooms holding hands of countless victims and their families, she completely understands our system and the rule of law. She appreciates the rules which make our judicial system the best in the world and embraces her role as a criminal prosecutor.

Ms. Bondi is a tenacious, but thoughtful, prosecutor. Crimes of violence upset her the most. She and I tried dozens of cases together before juries, including many first-degree murders. Her level of preparation was outstanding. Her ability to connect with a jury and speak to them on an understandable level was excellent. Juries loved her, defense counsel respected her, and courts listened to her. It was clear Ms. Bondi was there because she believed in what she was doing and the case she was presenting. She has that undefinable something that compels people to want her to succeed.

Ms. Bondi is tough. She quickly earned the title of Career Criminal Prosecutor at a young age due to her clear feelings about repeat offenders and her outstanding abilities in the courtroom. Her task was clear, prosecute the habitual offender seeking the highest sentence possible. She did just that,

would not budge in plea bargaining and almost always held the offender responsible for their offense. Due to her tough on crime approach, she found herself frequently in trial. She loves trying cases.

The impact prosecutors have on many lives is never lost on Ms. Bondi. I have never seen a prosecutor able to comfort a victim's family member like her. At every break during a trial she would immediately go back to sit with the victims, explain what was happening, and reassure them that things were going well. She directed victim resources and took part in consoling families at massive crime scenes where many lives were lost. She cares deeply for victims and their families.

But her deeds were not limited to victims. Traumatized witnesses would garner her support, police officers who experienced the horror of being forced to use deadly force, and even the families of a defendant.... families who had done nothing wrong. We were once prosecuting a case against a man who was facing first degree murder charges. Ms. Bondi discovered he had a young daughter who needed clothes, a uniform for school, but her mother had no money. Ms. Bondi spoke with me about how embarrassing this was for a little girl. The next thing I knew, she purchased several shirts and "skorts" for the defendant's child. This little girl would now look and feel like she fit in at school.

My point is that while Pam Bondi is a tenacious, hard charging prosecutor she has never lost her humanity. In her dedicated fight for justice, she never allows herself to stop caring about people and appreciate the little things that can impact lives. She is a complete prosecutor.

When Ms. Bondi became the Florida Attorney General, she did not forget her prosecutorial experiences. From the beginning she began taking steps to shield the Office of Statewide Prosecution and me from politics, knowing prosecutors must be independent and free of influence. She handled all our legislative needs and dealt with legislative or gubernatorial requests. She always tried to politically shield us so we could be truly independent and able to do our jobs well.

I recall the terrible death of an infant that occurred while in the care of the Florida Department of Children and Families. At the time, the Attorney

General's Office provided legal services for the Department. While the public attention focused on the Department, Ms. Bondi wondered if her legal team made any mistakes. I had just finished 4 years of service as a regional director for the Department, so Ms. Bondi asked me to review the matter with her Inspector General. We did so, and found legal errors were made. Ms. Bondi directed me to write a report with recommendations. When I did so, she released it publicly without hesitation. As a result, positive changes were made with the legal services procedures and practices. She took the hit but was later praised for doing it.

I am told some of you met Ms. Bondi before today. I am guessing many, if not all of you, noticed her very friendly nature. It is hard to walk away from meeting her and not like her, even if you do not agree with her. She is very kind and thoughtful. She likes people, and people like her. I know her family, especially her mother and late father who are salt of the earth, wonderful people. The apple did not fall far from the tree. You would be hard pressed to find people in Tampa who have any negative relationship or ill will towards her. Agree with her or not, Pam Bondi is a good person who cares.

To my colleagues at the Department of Justice, the many federal prosecutors throughout our country, I hope you get to work with Ms. Bondi as I have. As Mr. Aronberg recently said, you have nothing to fear from her as a prosecutor. To the contrary, you will find your work even more fulfilling and meaningful. You too will love working with Pam Bondi.