

Vanita Gupta Opening Statement
Confirmation Hearing
Senate Judiciary Committee
March 9, 2021

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee.

It is a privilege to appear before this Committee today as you consider my nomination for Associate Attorney General.

Thank you, Senators Warner and Kaine, for your gracious introductions.

Let me begin by introducing my husband, Chinh, and our sons, Rohan and Chetan, who are in the room today. My husband serves as the legal director of the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia, and I am proud of our shared commitment to public service.

I also want to express gratitude to my sister and her family, and to my parents, Rajiv and Kamla Gupta, who are watching on C-SPAN.

My parents are proud immigrants from India, and they believe more than anything in the promise of America. Growing up, they taught me that loving this country brings with it the obligation to do the necessary work to perfect our union. That belief is shared by my husband, whose family fled violence and war in Vietnam and sought refuge on these great shores.

It is because of this nation's welcome and my parent's sacrifice that I sit before this Committee today.

Only one agency in our federal government bears the name of a *value*. By virtue of that name — that value of *justice* — we know the Department carries a unique charge and North Star.

It is the sacred keeper of the promise of equal justice under the law.

If confirmed as Associate Attorney General, I pledge to this Committee and the American people that I will act for justice every day.

As a lifelong civil rights lawyer, I have committed my career to ensuring that the promises made in the Constitution are kept, and that our federal laws are fairly and impartially applied. That commitment to fairness under the law is the same one I saw every day from the career lawyers at the Department of Justice when I led the Civil Rights Division. If confirmed, I will aggressively

ensure that the Justice Department is independent from partisan influence. That independence is part of a long tradition, and it is vital to the fair administration of justice and preserving the public's trust and confidence in our legal system.

If confirmed, it will be the honor of my lifetime to assume the Associate Attorney General's responsibility to oversee the enforcement of our laws to protect the health, safety, and economic security of all Americans. That includes:

- Ensuring fair competition and preventing abuse of market power that harms consumers;
- Combating environmental degradation and promoting environmental justice;
- Enforcing our nation's civil rights laws and prosecuting hate crimes and human trafficking;
- Supporting crime victims, and survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence;
- Defending federal laws, regulations, policies, and programs, and making sure taxpayer dollars are safe from waste and fraud;
- Overseeing grant programs that support state, county, and municipal law enforcement and justice systems and build trust across communities.

Every day, the extraordinary professionals of the Justice Department support and defend the Constitution and uphold the rule of law with deep integrity

These are the same values that animated me in my first cases after law school, in a small town called Tulia, Texas.

I was a young lawyer representing 38 people wrongfully convicted in a drug sting which led to then Governor Rick Perry pardoning them and a \$6 million settlement.

The Tulia exonerations helped usher in a new era of bipartisan criminal justice reform. Texas led the way as one of the first states to start to roll back decades of racially unjust mass incarceration policies, saving lives and billions in taxpayer dollars. Other states like Georgia, South Carolina, and Louisiana have followed suit.

From that early experience on, I have spent my career dedicated to making real the promise of our federal laws and Constitution — and leading with my long-held conviction that addressing difficult problems requires building consensus.

In the years following the Tulia exonerations, I launched bipartisan campaigns with conservative leaders who are supporting my nomination today to secure safe and smart criminal justice reforms. When I led the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, I worked closely with law enforcement, community leaders, and residents — listening to their different perspectives and

concerns. As part of a priority initiative I launched to promote religious freedom, I also engaged faith leaders of all backgrounds about combatting religious discrimination.

When approaching the most entrenched problems of our time, I have been able to forge alliances across the political spectrum and build relationships of trust. I am humbled that my nomination is supported by the National Fraternal Order of Police, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, Major County Sheriffs, Major Cities Chiefs, National Sheriffs' Association, and others.

As the events on Jan 6th make clear, our democracy and Constitution do not protect themselves. It is people of good conscience who do.

I am deeply honored for the chance to return to work, with my fellow nominees and with the incredible women and men of the Justice Department — to uphold our Constitution and federal laws in pursuit of justice for all.

Thank you again for this opportunity.