

January 6, 2017

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Feinstein:

On behalf of the members Local 32BJ of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), I am writing to express our absolute opposition to the President-elect's nomination of Senator Jeff Sessions (R-AL) to be the Attorney General of the United States. Based off of Sen. Sessions' racially insensitive public statements and opposition to restoration of the Voting Rights Act, we strongly urge you to vote against Mr. Sessions' nomination when the matter comes before the Senate Judiciary Committee in the 115th Congress.

The task of the Attorney General is the head of the Department of Justice and chief law enforcement officer of the Federal Government--Mr. Sessions' history of racial insensitivity makes him unfit to serve as Attorney General. In 1986, when then-U.S. Attorney Sessions was nominated by former President Ronald Reagan to serve as a judge on the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Alabama, the Republican-controlled Senate was presented with compelling evidence that then-U.S. Attorney Sessions had a deeply troubling record as an opponent of civil rights enforcement, a champion of voter suppression tactics targeting African Americans, and a history of making racially-insensitive statements. Senator Sessions' record included warning an African-American colleague to be careful about what he said "to white folks," and speaking favorably about the Ku Klux Klan, as well as his prosecution of three African-American voting rights activists on dozens of charges that were promptly rejected by a jury.¹

Senator Sessions has also closely aligned himself with groups such as NumbersUSA, the Federation for American Immigration Reform, and the Center for Immigration Studies, all three of which were founded by John Tanton, who held white nationalist beliefs and called for the preservation of a "European-American majority." Senator Sessions has also received awards from the David Horowitz Freedom Center and Frank Gaffney's Center for Security Policy, two organizations designated as anti-Muslim hate groups by the Southern Poverty Law Center. Such associations with white-nationalist groups and anti-Muslim groups raise serious concerns about potential biases with Sessions possibly at the helm of the Justice Department. Americans should be protected by their government, not threatened by it, and Senator Sessions' nomination only makes communities of color feel further isolated by the incoming administration.

¹ Lena Williams, "Senate Panel Hands Reagan First Defeat on Nominee for Judgeship," *New York Times*, June 6, 1986, at <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/06/06/us/senate-panel-hands-reagan-first-defeat-on-nominee-for-judgeship.html>
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/06/23/the-gops-stunningly-rapid-political-shift-on-the-confederate-flag/>).

When it comes to voting rights, Senator Sessions has been a vocal opponent of the expansion of voting rights in states, and has fought against attempts to increase turnout in minority communities. In 1985, he tried but failed to prosecute three voting rights activists who were working to increase African-American registration and turnout. Senator Sessions has also voiced strong support for restrictive voter ID laws that have disenfranchised many otherwise eligible voters, even continuing to support such laws after his own state shut down locations where voters of color could get identification cards. He has also called the Voting Rights Act “intrusive” as it seeks to protect eligible minority voters, and praised the Supreme Court ruling in *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) that gutted a key part of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 which protected voters in states like his from laws that would restrict their access to the polls. Senator Sessions does not have the record of someone to be entrusted with the protection of voting rights for all Americans.

In conclusion, Senator Sessions’ publicly documented remarks and associations, as well as his stance on voting rights, prove he is unfit to be the top law enforcement official in the nation. Confirming Senator Sessions as Attorney General would be counter to the goals and purpose of the Department of Justice, and would stoke fear in the hearts of many Americans he’d be sworn to protect.

We therefore respectfully ask that you reject Senator Sessions’ nomination for Attorney General of the United States, and instead call upon the President-elect to put forth a nominee that values Americans from all backgrounds and will protect their rights as citizens of the United States.

Sincerely,

Hector Figueroa
President, 32BJ SEIU