

U.S. SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN
FLOOR STATEMENT ON THE NOMINATION OF ERIC HOLDER TO BE THE
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

January 13, 2009

“I’m honored to serve on the Judiciary Committee and in this body. However, the last couple of years have been difficult as we witnessed how poorly the Department of Justice has been managed. You’ve seen abuses of civil liberties in the name of trying to protect the rights of our citizens -- we abused the rights of our citizens. We found the Department of Justice tried to justify the use of torture in this country. We’ve seen hiring and firing practices in the Department of Justice itself politicized. I could go on and on and on.

“So I want to thank Eric Holder for being willing to serve the public once again as President-elect Obama’s nominee for the next Attorney General of the United States. I think that Eric Holder is the right person at right time for the Department of Justice and I hope that his confirmation process will move forward.

“We need an independent Attorney General. During the Bush Administration we found that they politicized the Department of Justice in the firing of U.S. Attorneys; in decisions as to whether to proceed with criminal investigations; and the list goes on and on and on. Eric Holder has demonstrated throughout his entire career the type of independence that we need in the next Attorney General of the United States.

“Mr. President, let me just give you one example. When the Independent Counsel who was investigating the President of the United States asked for additional authority, Eric Holder was the one who made that recommendation to proceed, even though it was not positive at all for the President of the United States. It’s that type of independence that we need in the next Attorney General of the United States. And let’s not forget the range of his experience. Eric Holder brings broad experience to his role, having been a judge, having been a former U.S. Attorney, and from the private sector.

“We need to take politics out of the Department of Justice. During the Bush Administration we found that politics was so interwoven into the personnel decisions made within the Department of Justice that it affected career attorneys. Now, that’s not supposed to be permitted, but it was done. We need the next Attorney General to be one who will make sure that politics has no place in those types of personnel decisions.

“Eric Holder, throughout his career, has shown a willingness to carry out his responsibilities in a nonpolitical way. He has handled major corruption cases as a U.S. Attorney against Democrats and Republicans. He understands the responsibilities of the Department of Justice.

“We also need the next Attorney General to reestablish the premier role of the Department of Justice and its Civil Rights Division. The Civil Rights Division historically has been the key agency to protect the civil rights of the people of this nation.

“We need the next Attorney General to reestablish that within the Department of Justice, as Eric Holder has already demonstrated, a sensitivity to restore a strong role for protecting voting rights for all Americans. I could go on and on, but the bottom line is that the next Attorney General must restore the reputation of the Department of Justice. And I believe Eric Holder is the right person to do so.

“It's not just me. Let me read from some of the record that has been presented to the Judiciary Committee. Both law enforcement and civil rights groups support Eric Holder. The Fraternal Order of Police writes that ‘our members reported they found Judge Holder and U.S. Attorney Holder an able and aggressive prosecutor.’

“The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, which is a coalition of the major civil rights advocates in this country, said, ‘Mr. Holder's various experience as a trial attorney, judge, prosecutor, and lawyer in private practice make him uniquely qualified to run the Department of Justice. It would be difficult to find a candidate more experienced in the Department or better suited to lead it. His background will render him ready to lead the Department from day one. His even-mindedness and sound judgment will sure that justice is dispensed fairly and equitably. His professional accomplishments and ability to put partisan politics aside make him above reproach. His commitment to the rule of law makes him the ideal candidate for the nation's top prosecutor.’ Now, that's the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights talking, which is comprised of the premier groups of this country out there fighting for the rights of the people of this country.

“I would also draw my colleagues’ attention to a January 7, 2009 letter received by the Judiciary Committee from several former high-level Department of Justice officials from Republican Administrations. And I quote from that letter. They write: ‘We are pleased to be able to write in support of Eric Holder, a man who stands with the most qualified, pro has been privileged to be nominated Attorney General of the United States. President-elect Obama’s nomination of Eric Holder as the first African-American Attorney General should be hailed as an historic milestone. He is an extraordinary lawyer and even a better person.’

“Mr. President, we need to move forward immediately with the leadership at the Department of Justice. I would just urge my colleagues that we move forward on the confirmation process as quickly as possible. I look forward to Eric Holder being the next Attorney General of the United States. I hope that we will do that very, very shortly.”

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