

Conyers Opening Statement for Justice Department Oversight Hearing

I am pleased to welcome the attorney general of the United States, Mr. Michael Mukasey.

Mr. Mukasey oversees what I consider to be the most important agency in the federal government, with jurisdiction over voting rights, civil rights, criminal and civil justice, antitrust, intellectual property enforcement, and bankruptcy to name but a few key areas. He assumes a very large responsibility and I look forward to a productive relationship between him and the members of this committee.

At the outset, I would like to note my disappointment that the attorney general did not respond in advance to the five areas of questioning I outlined in my letter to him of last week.

As the members know, the five-minute rule is not always the most efficient mechanism for disclosing information, while written questions submitted after a hearing take many months to respond to. I hope that we receive a timely written response to these questions quickly after today's hearing.

I would like to emphasize two areas that I would hope the attorney general would address in his opening statement today:

First, I continue to be frustrated by the administration's failure to fully and frankly address our nation's position on the odious practice of waterboarding. During his confirmation proceedings Mr. Mukasey was asked about waterboarding and said he would "examine the underlying memos and underlying facts" about what the U.S. has done and try to explain to Congress.

But after his confirmation, he refused to state whether waterboarding is torture or illegal, saying that there are "some circumstances" that current law would appear to prohibit it and "other circumstances would present a far closer question."

Just this week we learned that CIA agents have engaged in waterboarding, and that federal prosecutors appear to have known about the destruction of CIA interrogation tapes for more than a year before taking any action. Mr. Attorney General, my question is, will you tell us today whether you are willing to conduct a criminal investigation into these confirmed incidents of waterboarding?

Second, no issue is more important to me than voting rights and fair access to the ballot box. I have high hopes that the department and this committee can work together to ensure that the 2008 elections are as fair and open as any in our history.

We already have concerns about voting problems and questionable tactics in the ongoing presidential primaries, and I hope the attorney general will tell us today exactly what steps the department is taking to address this problem and that he will work with this committee and the Senate Judiciary Committee to set up a series of comprehensive meetings with the Voting Section and its staff so that we can ensure that every available resource is being deployed to protect our citizen's precious right to vote in the upcoming elections.

I thank the attorney general for his time and look forward to his testimony.

Opening Statement of Congressman Darrell Issa February 7, 2008 Committee on the Judiciary Hearing: "Oversight on the U.S. Department of Justice"

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate this opportunity to hear from Attorney General Michael Mukasey regarding his vision for the Department of Justice and the state of the Department which he inherited.

I frequently took opportunities such as this hearing to question Attorney General Mukasey's predecessors on the need for increased prosecution of human smugglers and other criminal aliens. I have encouraged the President, multiple attorney generals, and the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of California for years to prosecute more "coyotes" and criminal aliens. I have also sought and won appropriations specifically for this purpose.

I am heartened to read in Attorney General Mukasey's testimony that the President's budget includes \$7,000,000 for this purpose, and that these funds will be used in part to fund 40 additional U.S. Attorneys in border districts. "Coyotes" and other criminal aliens are some of the most dangerous individuals in the United States, and it is terribly important to confront them head on.

I look forward to hearing from Attorney General Mukasey on how the Department of Justice will continue down the path of increased criminal alien related prosecutions under his lead, as well as the myriad of other issues within the Department's jurisdiction.