

Statement of Chairman John Conyers, Jr.
for the
Oversight Hearing on the Department of Justice with
Attorney General Eric Holder
Before the Committee on the Judiciary

Thursday, May 14, 2009, at 10:00 A.M.

2141 Rayburn House Office Building

We convene today's oversight hearing as the department ushers in a new era of leadership with Attorney General Eric Holder. I want to personally welcome Attorney General Holder here today.

The committee looks forward to working with the new leadership of the department, while also ensuring that it is accountable to the American people. It is within this context that I would like to make three important points.

First, the attorney general and the department's new leadership should be applauded for the significant progress already made in only a few months on the job.

Second, despite that progress, there are still concerns and questions about the approach of the department and the administration to a number of key issues. These include:

1. The department's use of the state secrets privilege. While we know that the department is currently reviewing its policy and each case where the privilege has been invoked, we urge the department to adopt a policy allowing the privilege to be asserted only in appropriate circumstances.
2. The department's detention policy for detainees both at Guantanamo and around the world, including the possible use of military commissions.
3. The department's position with respect to possible prosecution of government officials who may have authorized and used torture, including whether to appoint a special counsel as 16 committee members have suggested.

4. The release of additional still-secret Office of Legal Counsel memos relating to the so-called war on terror and the pending Office of Professional Responsibility investigation on the attorneys who wrote such memos.
5. The department's position in the *Pigford* (black farmers) case.
6. The administration's decision to reverse course and oppose release of detainee abuse photos even after the department told a federal court that they would be released.
7. The proposal, contained in a bill I have introduced with bi-partisan support, to create an independent blue-ribbon commission to investigate and tell the American people the truth on conduct undertaken in the name of the war on terror.

Third, we hope that, moving forward, we will be able to work cooperatively with the department in an effort to promote the effective administration of justice.

In particular, we hope to continue to work together with the department on many of these unresolved issues, such as the closing of Guantanamo, any future necessary detention of terrorism detainees, and the state secrets privilege.

In addition, many of our investigations during the last Congress exposed the unfortunate deterioration of the department's historic reputation for independence and integrity. We hope to work with the attorney general to fully restore the reputation and stature of the Department of Justice.

I look forward to hearing from you, Mr. Attorney General, and to continuing a productive working relationship moving forward.