

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Opening Statement
Rep. John Conyers, Jr.

**Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on Economic Growth,
Job Creation and Regulatory Affairs and the Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on
the Constitution and Civil Justice**

Hearing on “DOJ’s Quid Pro Quo with St. Paul: A Whistleblower’s Perspective”

May 7, 2013

Mr. Chairman, although I am pleased to be your guest in this hearing room, I must object to the manner in which this hearing has been convened.

First, I object to the timing of this hearing—which has been scheduled at exactly the same time as a markup in the House Judiciary Committee. Our members must now choose between doing the business of the Full Committee and doing the business of the Subcommittee on the Constitution, when both deserve their undivided commitment.

This conflict is poor precedent and could have been easily avoided. I hope that we plan around such problems in the future.

Second, I must object to the title of this hearing. After extensive investigation—including review of thousands of documents and nearly a dozen interviews with Administration officials—there is no evidence that the Justice Department acted improperly in considering the case before us today.

There is no evidence of a so-called “quid pro quo.” And the courts have not yet determined that Mr. Newell—who will testify here today—is, in fact, a whistleblower.

Unnecessarily provocative language demeans the seriousness of the work we do in our committees. Our job is to uncover the facts, and then draw conclusions—not the other way around.

Finally, I object to this hearing on the grounds that its purpose is clearly intended to harm the reputation of a champion for civil rights and a decent public servant.

Tomorrow, the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions will consider the nomination of Assistant Attorney General Tom Perez to serve as the next Secretary of the Department of Labor.

His tenure as head of the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice has been successful by any measure. To suggest otherwise is both inaccurate and unfair.

Fortunately, Mr. Perez's record can more than withstand this partisan attack.

As noted in a recent report of the Department of Justice's Office of the Inspector General, although Mr. Perez inherited a Civil Rights Division in disarray, he has since righted the ship.

In fact, to the extent the Inspector General's report mentions Mr. Perez at all, it clears him of wrongdoing and credits him for his management practices.

Moreover, under his leadership:

- ☐ The Division has obtained \$660 million in lending settlements, including the three largest lending discrimination settlements in the Department's history.

- ☐ The Division obtained \$128 million in the largest recovery ever awarded in an employment discrimination case.

- ☐ The Division secured \$16 million as part of a settlement to enforce the Americans with Disabilities Act at more than 10,000 banks and other financial retail offices across the country.

- ☐ And in the last year alone, the Division has opened 43 new voting rights cases—more than twice the number than in any previous year—and filed 13 additional objections to discriminatory voting practices under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act.

Mr. Perez has accomplished these tasks and more, and he has restored the confidence and effectiveness of his career staff. There may be some who disagree with Mr. Perez's policy objectives, but even his political opponents should be impressed by his achievements.

I have, over the course of the past two years, made several requests for hearings on matters including the wave of changes in state voting law, various Voting Rights Act preclearance cases, and the Division's enforcement of the National Voter Registration Act.

To date, we have not held a single substantive hearing on any of those topics. My colleagues and I have held forums on these issues across the country—the public's interest in these matters is overwhelming.

Instead of discussing voting rights and other topics of pressing importance, today will mark the second time in less than a month that the House Judiciary Committee joins in the attack on Mr. Perez. In my view, that sad fact is demeaning to both committees represented here today.

Before any of my colleagues accuse the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights of injecting politics where politics do not belong, I urge them to think hard about the evidence and about the context for this hearing today.

I hope my colleagues will put aside this partisan rhetoric and return to the people's business.