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**Attorney General Sessions Must Adhere to Promises, Be Accountable to the People**

Statement of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund on the Confirmation of Jeff Sessions to be Attorney General of the United States

Despite deep opposition from Americans from around the country and all walks of life, 52 senators voted to confirm Jeff Sessions to be the Attorney General of the United States. This vote comes in the wake of a breathtaking anti-democratic maneuver by Majority Leader McConnell and his caucus to attempt to silence debate and continue a 30-year effort to quash truth-telling about Jeff Sessions’ history and record.

But the history is clear. There can be no doubt Mr. Sessions has a long and troubling record of hostility to vital civil rights laws, laws protecting women, people with disabilities, members of minority groups, LGBTQ Americans, and more. Yet from before his nomination was even announced, Mr. Sessions and his allies attempted to rewrite his history and his record to portray him as a champion of civil rights.

Mr. Sessions is well aware of the demands the people and the Constitution place upon him. During the confirmation of Attorney General Loretta Lynch, Sessions declared “This is the top law enforcement job in America, not a political position, and anyone who holds this position must have total fidelity to the laws and Constitution of the United States. They must be willing and able to tell the president no if he overreaches. That has historically been one of the tough responsibilities of the Attorney General of the United States. They cannot be a mere rubber stamp to any idea the president has.”

Mr. Sessions also said to Sally Yates, whom Donald Trump summarily fired when she refused to defend his unconstitutional Muslim ban, that “You have to watch out because people will be asking you to do things and you need to say no.” Sally Yates said no, and Jeff Sessions must be willing to show the same strength of character and commitment to the rule of law. During his hearing, he declared that “if the attorney general is asked to do something that’s plainly unlawful” – like ignore a court order – “that person would have to resign ultimately before agreeing to execute a policy that the attorney general believes would be unlawful or unconstitutional.”

“Beyond this basic commitment to independence and rule of law, Mr. Sessions must also adhere to the promises that he made during his confirmation hearing, including aggressively enforcing all federal laws, even those he voted against and disagreed with on issues ranging from hate crimes to abortion to voting rights,” said Ifill. Mr. Sessions recognized the Attorney General’s “responsibility and duty to intervene” under the Voting Rights Act when states have enacted discriminatory voter suppression laws. He also committed to continuing to enforce vital school desegregation consent decrees. However, there are
many issue areas like immigration, criminal justice reform, and religious freedom, where Mr. Sessions has either given no assurances or, worse, made statements that raise deep concern over his commitment to fairness and equality.

“It is incumbent upon every senator who voted on Sessions’ nomination, whether for or against, to ensure he holds to the promises that he made to them and the American people while under oath, and demonstrates that he will be an Attorney General for all people,” Ifill continued.

There are many areas where the future direction of the Department of Justice is either in question or the source of rightful apprehension. “We hope that the Department will fill its historic role as a defender of civil rights. But regardless of any future actions taken by Attorney General Sessions, as we have done during every other administration since our founding, LDF will continue to fight for the civil rights of every American, whether the Department of Justice is at our side, or facing off against us,” concluded Ifill.

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*Founded in 1940, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF) is the nation’s first civil and human rights law organization and has been completely separate from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights. LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund or LDF.*