

**Statement of Senator Susan Collins
Nomination of Senator Jeff Sessions to be U.S. Attorney General
January 10, 2017**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, Senator Feinstein, members of this distinguished Committee: I am pleased to join Senator Shelby in presenting my friend and colleague, Senator Jeff Sessions, and to offer my support for his nomination to be our next Attorney General.

Jeff Sessions and I were first sworn into the United States Senate on the very same day. In the 20 years since, we have worked closely on some issues and on opposite sides on others. In fact, it would be fair to say that we have had our share of vigorous debates and policy disagreements. Through these experiences, I have come to know Senator Sessions professionally as a trusted colleague and personally as a good friend. I can vouch confidently for the fact that Jeff Sessions is a person of integrity, a principled leader, and a dedicated public servant.

As a Senator, Jeff Sessions has worked across the aisle to lead important legislative reforms. He has worked with Senator Dick Durbin to pass the Fair Sentencing Act, a law that addressed the unfair racial disparity in crack cocaine sentencing. He worked with Senator Ted Kennedy to pass the Prison Rape Elimination Act and with Senator Chris Coons on the Reauthorization of the Victims of Child Abuse Act.

An area where Senator Sessions and I have worked together is in opposing unfair trade agreements and practices that hurt American workers.

What I want this Committee and the American people to know is that Jeff Sessions is the same genuine, fair-minded person in unguarded, private moments as he is in the halls of the Senate. We first came to know each other during dinners with other members of our Senate class, where we've discussed everything from our politics to our families. I have never witnessed anything to suggest that Senator Sessions is anyone other than a dedicated public servant and a decent man.

In 1980, long before he ran for the Senate or even dreamed of being Attorney General, Jeff Sessions sponsored the first African-American member of the Mobile Lions Club. As U.S. Attorney, he provided leadership in the successful convictions of two Klan members who had murdered an African-American teenager. As Ranking Member of the Senate Judiciary Committee in 2009, he appointed the first African-American to serve as Chief Counsel to the Republican members. My friends, these are not the actions of an individual who is motivated by racial animus.

In spite of this strong record, Senator Sessions' nomination has generated controversy. He has had to withstand some very painful attacks on his character – both years ago and again today – with little or no acknowledgment of his accomplishments and actions or the responses he has made to the accusations levied against him.

As this Committee debates this nomination, I would draw your attention to an important epilogue to Jeff Sessions' nomination 31 years ago to be a federal judge.

The late Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, was a member of the Judiciary Committee when the Sessions nomination was considered in 1986. Senator Specter, then a Republican, voted against Jeff Sessions. Years later, in 2009, Senator Specter had switched parties. He was asked by a reporter if he regretted any of the more than 10,000 votes he had cast. Out of all those votes, then-Democratic Senator Specter cited just one: it was his vote against confirming Jeff Sessions as a federal judge.

When asked why, Senator Specter replied, "because I have since found that Senator Sessions is egalitarian." In other words, once Senator Specter served with Jeff Sessions and had the opportunity to get to know him, he changed his mind.

I hope that you will keep Arlen Specter's reflections in mind as this Committee evaluates Senator Sessions' public service, his character, and his fidelity to the rule of law. The members of this Committee have an advantage that Senator Specter did not. The vast majority of you have already served with Senator Sessions, and you know him well.

If this Committee places its trust in him, I have every confidence that Jeff Sessions will execute the office of Attorney General honestly, faithfully, and fully in the pursuit of justice.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.