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June 12, 2017

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations

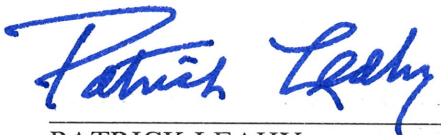
The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies

Dear Chairman Cochran and Chairman Shelby:

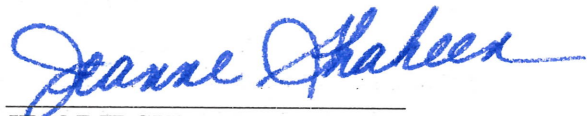
On Saturday evening, June 10, 2017, we learned that Attorney General Jeff Sessions cancelled his appearance before the Senate Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies. He did so abruptly and unexpectedly, and for the second time in as many months. In lieu of the Attorney General's testimony, the Subcommittee is now scheduled to hear testimony from Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein.

It is highly unusual for the Subcommittee to hold a budget hearing with the Deputy when there is a sitting Attorney General. As the nation's chief law enforcement officer, the Attorney General is the appropriate person to come before this Subcommittee and testify as to the work of the Department. There are important questions to be answered. The Appropriations Committee has a longstanding history of conducting oversight of all of the agencies under its jurisdiction, and that includes direct questioning of each agency head in an open forum. In declining to attend tomorrow's hearing, the Attorney General has cited a conflict with a last-minute request to testify before the Senate Intelligence Committee. This raises the question of whether the Attorney General is attempting to avoid oversight of this Committee, and it certainly does not obviate his responsibility to answer questions of this Committee. We must not enable the Attorney General to avoid public scrutiny by our Committee out of concern that such testimony would be embarrassing. That is exactly why our Committee's oversight function and traditions are so important.

Therefore, we request you reschedule the hearing for a time when the Attorney General is available to attend. We agree with the Attorney General "that appropriations hearings are an important way for both Congress and the American people to learn about" the Department of Justice's "vital" work. The American people deserve a chance to hear from him in open session.



PATRICK LEAHY
Vice Chairman



JEANNE SHAHEEN
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies