



**STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN CONYERS Hearing to Receive Testimony of James B. Comey, Jr.
Regarding U.S. Attorney Firings and Related Matters May 3, 2007**

Today, we take another step aimed at getting to the truth in our investigation of the recent mass firings of U.S. Attorneys.

As we meet today, we have learned a number of facts. We now know that the firings were part of a long-laid plan involving the very highest levels of the Department of Justice and the White House. We know that mis-statements were made concerning the reasons for such firings by high-ranking members of the Department of Justice, up to and including the Attorney General. We know that several Department officials have resigned in connection with this matter, and that at least one such official is asserting her fifth amendment rights.

We also know that numerous questionable, if not improper, communications were made by Members of Congress to several of the U.S. Attorneys concerning pending prosecutions before they were fired, and that efforts were made after the firings to discourage the U.S. Attorneys from cooperating in our inquiry. We know that thousands of e-mails relating to this matter have been lost, misplaced, or destroyed, in potential violation of federal law. And we know that the Department has opened up two separate internal inquiries related to these matters.

What we don't know as we meet is who actually made the decision to place U.S. Attorneys on the firing list. The Attorney General told us it was not him. Mr. Sampson has denied making the substantive judgments. We have interviewed numerous senior officials in the Department, and all deny making the actual decision to place these names on the list.

The role of the White House remains yet elusive, in large part due to their failure to cooperate with this Committee's inquiry.

Against this backdrop we are fortunate to have as our witness today James Comey, former Deputy Attorney General of the United States. Mr. Comey has a unique perspective on the recent firings of the eight United States Attorneys by the Bush Administration, because he worked closely with many of them as a fellow United States Attorney, and he supervised them and their offices for a substantial period of time as Deputy Attorney General.

Mr. Comey has a superb reputation as a career federal prosecutor, as an effective and highly qualified Deputy Attorney General, and as a straight shooter, who has always embodied the highest and best traditions of the Department of Justice.

As a hands-on Deputy, Mr. Comey had an excellent opportunity to work with, and evaluate the work of, the United States Attorneys whose resignations were forced by the Bush Administration in late 2006, particularly the six who testified before this Committee last month.

We owe it to the American people to learn the true reasons for the firings, and we are determined to do so. We expect that, after today, we will be better able to assess whether the after-the-fact rationalizations that have been offered so far for the firings ring true, and what impact the firings may have had on the Department and its hard-earned reputation for independence and integrity.